

THE CENTENNIAL REVIEW

VOL.V, NO.2 SPRING 1961

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CATHARSIS—SECOND VIEW¹

Kenneth Burke

I

IN OUR FIRST VIEW OF CATHARSIS, because we were working primarily with Greek models we stressed the *civic* nature of the "pollution" for which tragedy concocts a remedy. But there is a sense in which even elations or sorrows shared by us as members of a collectivity are experienced by us as *individuals*, quite as each person at a public banquet derives a particular gratification from the particular food that is eaten by him in particular. The centrality of the nervous system is a *principium individuationis* whereby, no matter how collective the nature of our symbol-systems and of the socio-political structures that go with them, our pleasures and pains are our own naturally inalienable private property. And though all human animals go through the same general set of physiological and psychological processes, *universality* of that sort by no means removes the *individuality* intrinsic to the *centrality* of the nervous system. So our second view of Catharsis will shift the emphasis, though many of the observations in this second view might as well have been considered in the first. Also, the individuating nature of the nervous system will require us once more to consider the matter of "body-thinking," though this time from quite a different point of view.

So far as the body participates directly in the producing of catharsis by the organizing of symbol-systems, its two typical expressions are laughter and tears. The striking thing about both these modes of release is their nature as *completions*, *fulfillments*. Weeping or laughing are *end-products*. They have the finality of a ship coming into port. Also, although as responses to works of art they arise out of purely *symbolic*

¹This paper is a chapter from the forthcoming book by Mr. Burke, *Poetics, Dramatistically Considered*.

processes, at the same time they are both intensely *physical*. Thus, there is a sense in which they perfectly bridge the gap between man's nature as sheer animal and his nature as sheerly "rational" or "spiritual" (as symbol-user).

They differ in one notable respect: tears are a secretion, but laughter is not. To be perfectly symmetrical, we should match "laughter" not with "tears," but with "weeping." This alignment reminds us that *both* laughter and weeping can terminate in tears—but whereas mild weeping can cause tears, the same effect is produced only by intense, hysterical laughter, a distinction that must have a great deal to do with the relation between tragic catharsis and comic catharsis, though we're not quite sure what it might be. Nor are we quite sure just how the difference between tragedy and comedy is aligned with the difference between tears of sorrow and tears of joy.

But one thing is certain: though both pitiful weeping and mirthful laughter may be akin to love, they are not identical with it. And love has its own kind of bodily release (completion, fulfillment) different from the kinds of release natural to tragedy and comedy.

Surely the most "cathartic" experience possible would be the ability to love everything, without reservation, in such bodily spontaneity as attains its purely *verbal* counterpart in ejaculations of thanksgiving or praise. But besides the many situations which do not arouse in us the expansiveness of love, there are many others in which, even if we do feel so inclined, the social proprieties have inhibited the expressions natural to such an attitude.

Thus, whereas ideas of mirth readily attain natural bodily fulfillment in laughter, and ideas of pity lead similarly to tears, the codes of propriety that take shape in accordance with particular systems of property greatly restrict a corresponding naturalness of expression as regards the most cathartic emotion of all, the emotion of love.

We take it, then, that tragic catharsis through fear and pity operates as a *substitute* for catharsis through love. One's state of identification or communion with the object of one's pity is nearly like the kind of identification or communion

one feels for a loved object—yet this slight deflection is enough to permit a natural bodily outlet which, under many conditions, is deemed permissible, whereas a corresponding expression of love in its direct form would not be. (Secondarily, of course, the restrictions on the expression of love may extend by contagion until they also greatly restrict the expression of *any* emotion. But in general there do remain available the subterfuges of imaginary pity.)

The total situation, then, would be as follows: perfect catharsis would arise from a sense of universal love. Insofar as such a condition is not attained, the next best thing is a sense of radical pity that lies on the slope of tearful release. Fear is not directly cathartic; but it is cathartic indirectly, insofar as it sets up the conditions for the feeling of pity. Wonder is cathartic in that, whereas it is in the same spectrum with fear, it is on the other edge of the spectrum, being itself a kind of "cleansed fear," like reverence. It in turn is aided by various devices such as heroic diction, that give magnitude to the action. Insofar as pity is employed to arouse our moral indignation, it is not wholly cathartic; but it may be employed secondarily to this end if the non-vindictive use of pity is primary. (Similarly, "derisive" laughter lacks the wholly cathartic function of "sympathetic" laughter, which comes close to pity. In *Don Quixote* the derisive becomes transformed into the sympathetic as the story proceeds.)

First, then, there is the fact that the expression of love, being greatly restricted by custom, attains as surrogate the expression of pity. Next, there is the fact that, even if the expression of love were not greatly restricted, we should ordinarily have great difficulty in loving our enemies. Pity solves this problem, too. For Aristotle observes that we pity undeserved suffering. And thus we could in imagination pity even our worst enemy, if we imagined him as undergoing heavier punishment than even we would wish on him. Finally, tragic catharsis by pity may provide a solution for a kind of universal or categorical love, "embracing all mankind," communing sympathetically with "everything," in an idealis-

tic, depersonalized way that lacks body. Such "dialectical" kind of love, "loving in principle," puts a great strain on the imagination, if one would prevent the attitude from losing immediacy and becoming a mere edified "statement of policy" on mankind. For love is fullest only when immediately personal, whereas such a generalized attitude makes far too great diluting or abstracting of the emotion. And tragic pity, with its resources of *enargeia*, for bringing the person in his pitiable-ness before our very eyes, helps to correct even such caricatures of "positive thinking" as mark this kind of humanitarianism, or vague benevolence (which is, ironically, the counterpart of equally remote preparations for professional slaughter on the grand scale, when, as, and if the order is given).

II

Insofar as symbol-systems involve relationships and developments intrinsic to themselves and thus not strictly translatable into any kinds of bodily or social behavior, such purely symbolic sequences may possess modes of gratification or release not explainable by reference to physical hypotheses at all (except in the sense that the failure to solve a problem in physics or mathematics might impair a person's health, whereas success at finding a solution could have a good effect upon his attitude towards people and things in general).

When, in Poetics, we analyze the workings of a symbol-system, we require no reference to possible ways in which people might, by the complications of a plot, become in some sense physically charged and thus made ready to enjoy a corresponding physical state of discharge. Yet when asking about the possible relation between the symbol-using animal and his symbols, we do have to consider such "hypotheses," since the non-symbolic body is a necessary hypothesis of all symbol-systems.

So we must keep too different considerations in mind here. We must be on the look-out for possibilities of symbolic development that quite "transcend" the body (except insofar

as physiological motions are a necessary ground of all empirical symbolic action). And we must be on the look-out for respects in which the body does figure, when we go from questions about comedy and tragedy as cathartic instruments to questions about laughter and tears as cathartic instruments. And as we should guard against seeking for too close a correlation between the body and its symbol-systems, so we should guard against a tendency to ignore the points at which the two realms do significantly correlate.

There is a relevant passage in the *Divine Comedy*, where Dante seems to indicate that, at least under certain conditions, tearfulness is analogous to going off half-cocked. The passage is in the *Purgatorio*, which should be watched with special care where questions of catharsis are concerned, particularly since Dante is exceptionally sensitive to analogies between ideas and their corresponding body-images.

In Canto XXX, Dante sees Beatrice for the first time, though her spirit has brooded over his entire climb, through Hell and up the Mount to Paradise—and in a sense every reference to blessings (as with the succession of Beatitudes, a different one of which is sung in each circle of Purgatory) indirectly bears upon her, the Woman Who Blesses. He says that she seems to him as *superba* as a mother seems to her child (*così la madre al figlio*). But in the next canto, a remark by Beatrice herself will remind us that this "child," with his head hanging bashfully, wears a *beard*. Lines 16-21 of this next canto describe how he bursts into a torrent of tears and sighs (*lagrime e sospiri*) that cause the voice of this bearded "child" to die away as he addresses his motherlike beloved.

Dante here employs the figure of a cross-bow that breaks from too great tension ("under this heavy charge"), whereat the bolt hits the mark "with lessened force." Later, Beatrice develops the figure of arrows being shot at birds; and she also refers to "the seed of weeping" (*il seme del piangere*) in connection with her rebukes to Dante for some unsavory amative adventures he had had since her death.

True, there is no explicit authorization at this point to interpret bows and arrows and seeds "venereally." In fact, there

is even one notable sense in which we are strictly forbidden to do so. Though the nearest circle outside the realm of Paradisaic love is that where the lustful are diligently purging themselves by fire, the turn from lust to "innocent" love has been epitomized in Matilda's partial quotation from the first line of the Thirty-Second Psalm: "Blessed are those . . . whose sins are covered" (the Old Testament usually speaking of forgiveness as a way of "covering" sin rather than as its cancellation or obliteration).

But the context of the cantos leaves no doubt that such images are "venereal" at least in a "transcendent" sense. Indeed, in an earlier canto Dante has been told that *all* motivation is reducible to terms of love and the perversions of that motive. But of course there still remains the question: just how specifically would you interpret the idea of the venereal (just how much sheerly "bodily" motivation would you assume to be lurking in these figures that are themselves a deflection of sexuality in the strictly physical sense, even while they suggest it)?²

III

The simplest distortion of love, from the standpoint of catharsis, is the kind of art that would arouse sexual desire sheerly by the flaunting of sexual wares. Here is the burlesque

² To review briefly the neat arrangement of the circles in Purgatory, with relation to the fact that all motivation has been reduced to terms of love:

Farthest down the Mount are the *perversions* of love (forms of ill-will towards one's neighbor). Lowest of all is Pride, the desire to excel by the abasement of others. Then comes Envy, resentment because the exalting of others implies the abasing of oneself. Then Wrath, the desire for vengeance, due to a sense of being wronged. The next higher circle, Sloth, occupies a midway position, a kind of dead center. It is a realm described by the word *accidia*, a term applied by the literature of mysticism to the state of "bitterness" or drought that arises when the mystic exaltation has flagged. Here the poet himself becomes so slothful that he closes the canto by rhyming *cerchi* with *cerchi*, though within this laziness there is a kind of enterprise, too, since the first *cerchi* is a plural form of the noun "circle," while the second *cerchi* is a second person, singular form of the verb "search." It is also notable that precisely here Dante has Virgil outline the logic of the whole cantic, and indeed give the motivational reduction of the poem as a whole. (Is he not thus in effect saying that, when we are stopped, precisely then we may start anew by pausing to *study* our situation?) The next higher circles are of *excessive* love: avarice, gluttony, and lust respectively—and as we pass through the purgative circle of the lustful we are not far from the loveliness of the Garden.

of catharsis, as with the responses of the recondite roué who, after witnessing a lewd show, bought himself a steak, took it to his room, and pinched it unmercifully. Milder forms of such art are the specialty of Hollywood, which aims to have its stars appeal to their audiences as succubae and succubi.

A sufficiently mild and pleasant instance of pity as a subterfuge is the fantasy of the gallant coming to the aid of the Damsel in Distress. The lady, who would otherwise be aloof, is imagined as being placed in a situation that would justify the gentleman's advances. Without the assistance of her "pitiful" condition, he would be in the position of "forcing" his attentions upon her (attentions which the code would otherwise have demanded that she "repel," however much against her wishes).

Elsewhere we have considered how Wagner inclines towards the route that leads to love via pity. Othello touches upon the same connection in his way when saying of Desdemona (I,iii): "She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd/And I lov'd her that she did pity them."

From there we might advance in another direction by considering the subtle disrelationship between *eros* (sexual, erotic love, *amor*) and *agape* (*charitas*, sheerly familial affection, shading into goodwill generally). Whatever the relation or disrelation between dramatic catharsis and love, the dissociation of erotic and agapetic motives must in itself raise problems that are never quite resolved. And insofar as a unitary principle underlies this dissociation, even the most thoroughgoing agapetic motives may be accompanied by erotic symptoms, as we learn from the writings of mystics such as Saint John of the Cross or St. Teresa of Avila.

Clearly the appeal of pity in Greek tragedy was agapetic. But we may expect it to have had erotic implications in the sense that, all tension having (within the terms of the fiction) been temporarily resolved, the individual members of the audience might well be in such a state of mind that erotic enjoyments could naturally follow, to cap the climax.

In sum, though pity is agapetic rather than erotic, it is on the slope of the erotic; and its tears imply such a letting-down

of bars as can well culminate in a sheerly erotic act (albeit an act still somewhat edified by the spirit of the agapetic theme that led into it). However, since the arousing of pity requires the imitation of suffering, there are the deviations whereby the ambiguous relation between love and pity becomes rather an ambiguous relation between the erotic and cruelty. Here is an incident that provides a simple instance of such confusion, and in fact shows how the confusion can arise, as a kind of subterfuge. It is the "drama" of a young girl, of about ten or eleven, being "attacked" by two slightly older boys:

The scene: a playground near a school. The three children are on the way home. The two boys seize the girl, pull her to the ground, and aimlessly maul her in ways that could vaguely be classed under the head of "fighting." She makes such an outcry, demanding to be let alone, that they become frightened and release her. She rises and indignantly adjusts her clothing while the two boys stand back abashed. But at this point, instead of walking away as she could have done without being molested further, she gives one of the boys an angry shove—whereat the whole cycle begins anew, and is carried through to the same end, *da capo ad lib*. Here doubtlessly was a rudimentary kind of improvising, adapted to the fact that the code forbade such intimate bodily contacts if they were made in terms of affection. Accordingly, this state of intimacy, incipiently erotic, could be "properly" contrived only by the subterfuges of pugnacity and violence. In "defending" herself so stoutly, the girl would have nothing to "confess," though here surely were the makings of such "love" as could eventually express itself only by deviously sadistic or masochistic twists, ingredients that necessarily throw the ingredients of the recipe for tragedy out of proper proportion to one another.

Further, insofar as choice of sexual mate involves fighting among rivals, it is conceivable that the two essentially dissociated attitudes (of love and anger) could become merged into a simultaneity. For instance, if a dog is barking in rage at some distant threat, it may suddenly turn to snap at its master if its master happens to surprise it by a touch to which

the dog spontaneously responds in terms of its rage-situation and before recognizing that there has also been introduced a "hand that feeds" situation. Thus, under certain condition, the turn from fighting with a rival to courting a mate might be so "telescoped into a simultaneity" that the motives of the fight situation become one with the motives of the courtship-situation—and thus in effect ingredients of rage proper to the rivalry could be directed against the loved object itself. At many points in this text we have come upon the notion that such telescoping is implicit in the nature of symbolic consistency. For insofar as the parts of a development are consistent, a single motivational principle must penetrate them all—and there is a sense in which such a principle obliterates its own distinctions.

Another common deflection involves a situation whereby dialectical resources lend themselves well to rhetorical self-deception. By such confusions, *hate* can be presented in terms of a "higher love." Thus on a radio program broadcasting a Sunday morning devotion, we heard this apt bit of militant sloganizing: "If you have a good religion, you must fight for it." Deceptions here could conceivably enter from two sources: (1) the "fighting" could be done in ways that are really a mockery of the "religion" that is supposedly being defended; (2) the "religion" could be but a covering for interests that are not only not religious, but essentially anti-religious.

As regards religion in general: its use to the ends of catharsis may often be at odds with its use as an administrative device, a means of "social control." The idea of Hell as a deterrent permits even threats of eternal torment to be equated with love, as when sinners are "lovingly" warned to mend their ways. But quite as "Mercy," which is a variant of "Pity," equals "Promise of Heaven," so "Justice," which is a variant of "Vengeance," equals "Threat of Hell." Thus, a theology as complex as the Christian is not intrinsically cathartic, though it can be manipulated to cathartic ends, by the stressing of some features and the slighting of others. The stories of mass conversion recited in the New Testament are obvious instances of the cathartic; but Paul's great administrative

genius enabled him, even while placing great stress upon the cathartic principle, to build up the kind of ecclesiastical organization that would make the church an arm of government. Yet whatever might be one's difficulties when it came to loving troublesome neighbors, these problems might be lost sight of. For one could stress the love of God; and since God could be conceived of as a *universal* principle *personalized*, here would be dogmatic conditions favorable to catharsis.³

IV

One difficulty in trying to analyze catharsis as a process is due to what we might call "fragmentation." "Fragmentation" arises from the fact that the sacrificial motive can be broken into several moments, each of which has its own kind of universe.

For instance, insofar as the sacrifice is thought to purify, there may be rites whereby the persons who perform the sacrifice purify themselves as a way of preparing for their office. Thus the sacrificial principle will figure secondarily in regi-

³ As regards universalized love, a typical semi-secularized pattern (in a lyric related to outright religious thought somewhat as Greek drama was to its origins in the Dionysian rites) would be Coleridge's lines in "The Eolian Harp":

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

And lyrics in the spirit of the lines just quoted from Coleridge can best be placed as Plato's method translated back again into poetry, with a greater stress upon imagery, though Plato's myth always had this, too.

The famous lines in "The Ancient Mariner," where the sufferer impulsively blesses the loathesome snakes, illustrates a similar semi-secularization of the problem concerning the love of enemies:

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware.

Note that the curative moment here involves the personalizing of an animal species rather than the recognition of human personality; and the ethical shifts towards the aesthetic, in that these creatures are suddenly loved not for their "goodness" (as the book of Genesis might have required) but for their "beauty."

mens of penance, mortification, self-denial, study, etc.—and these in turn may allow for another kind of fragmentation, in the direction of “indulgences” which, while reaffirming the sacrificial principle by taking for granted the assumptions that lie behind it, nonetheless at the same time introduce laxities that threaten it from another quarter. Or, when considering the details of a sacrificial ceremony, we may find some that are isolable like arias in an opera, or like the Stations of the Cross.

This matter of “fragmentation” is another aspect of the ambiguous relation between logical and temporal sequence. The cathartic process of a drama occurs in an irreversible temporal order. But its “moments” along the way are also related like a set of terms that mutually imply one another, without regard to any one temporal or narrative arrangement. Temporally, for instance, “infancy” may be one stage in a rebirth process—but when the Christians isolate the idea and image of the infant Jesus as a kind of summarizing moment to be depicted by itself, the moment can be so “dwelt on” that quite another kind of development takes place. And thus, since the idea of an infant implies the idea of a mother, pictures of Madonna and Child can be developed to the point where the stress shifts from Jesus to Mary. This development is *internal* to the moment; yet while it still remains related to the moment’s place in the narrative as a whole, it can introduce an emphasis that some of the faithful will feel as a shift from “Christianity” towards “Mariolatry.”

The dwelling upon moments makes possible a kind of development which threatens to obscure the functioning of that moment in the process as a whole. For instance, since a rite involving the use of a scapegoat has motives of murder and cruelty “implicit” in it, this confusion does not seem quite resolvable either by a sheerly humanitarian sympathy with the victim (through whose sacrifice the cleansing is expected to occur), or through an over-eager emphasis upon the details of the suffering, or by such overly “rational” arrangements as the ancient Greeks finally hit upon, when keeping on reserve a supply of prisoners who had been condemned to

death for crimes but were used as sacrificial victims whenever the priests decided that a public purification was called for. Here also would figure the paradoxical scruples of one moment in the rites of Holy Week, when Adam's first disobedience is called "happy"; for by thus burdening all mankind with an inheritance of "original sin," it led to Christ's coming in behalf of the Redemption, a mission that, considered in itself, could be called "happy," though it culminated in a blood-offering. (See Herbert Weisinger's *Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall*, for examples of the way in which this moment can be dwelt upon and expanded by "cyclical" associations.) "Heretics" such as the Ophites and the Stercoranistae built their troublesome doctrines by thus dwelling upon some one incidental moment in a system of interrelated terms until it became the "first" of the lot.

As regards the problem of drama in general, there is a troublesome moment of this sort which recurs too constantly to be treated merely as "incidental." This involves the relation between "sacrifice" and "the kill" (an ambiguity whereby Ernest Hemingway's somewhat repellent cult of the kill has acquired an almost nauseating popularity because it can impart a sense of the sacrificial without having to negotiate the machinery of theology). The problem is reducible to these propositions:

Purgatives are divided into three kinds, depending on the intensity of their effects: laxatives, cathartics, and drastics. The word for the most intense variety comes from the same Greek root as the word for "drama." Insofar as people like drama, they necessarily like victimage. For there can be no drama without the imitation of suffering in some form (ranging from comic embarrassment and bewilderments through varying degrees of hardship to torture and death). In this sense, news stories of people in conflicts and catastrophes make the same appeal, but here the imitations are replaced by real victims.

Closely related to this cult of victimage implicit in the very nature of drama there is the act of *vicarage*, of *substitution*. The purgative effect of drama seems to require *vicarious* victimage, quite as in the case of the Christian drama built

around the central moment of Christ as Mediator. We should call substitution not a "fragmentary moment" of the cathartic motive, but the principle that underlies purgative victimage in general. (There is a certain paradoxical element with regard to suicide, however. Insofar as suicide is an attempt at catharsis, the purgand would seek to cleanse the self by using the self as purgative victim. This design becomes more obvious in its less drastic forms, as with people who deliberately "invite trouble." Popular speech recognizes the paradox in saying that such a person is "beside himself.")

V

A clear example of what we mean by "fragmentation" would be in Acts viii, 12: "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." Note two different moments here: (1) the kind of cleansing that went with the conversion, or change of belief itself; (2) the kind of cleansing that went with the rite of baptism. Theologians have called baptism a "regeneration," as distinct from "conversion"; but as seen from our formalistic point of view, either the change of belief or the "regenerative" bath of baptism could be considered as "fragments" of the cathartic principle in general.

There is an interesting fragmentation in Dante's *Purgatorio*, where the idea of a cleansing is figured in the image of a double stream, the waters on one side being called Lethe (because they had the power to cleanse by obliterating the memory of past sins), the waters on the other side being called Eunoë (because of their power to sharpen the memory of past good deeds). In her comic novel of split personality, *The Bird's Nest*, Shirley Jackson gets excellent burlesque by a fantastically efficient ritual cleansing, when all four of the heroine's personalities take baths in succession, without knowledge of one another, but all necessarily bathing the same body. Here fragmentation gets a new twist. Or we could cite K. Burke's piece, "The 'Anaesthetic Revelation' of

Herone Liddell" (*Kenyon Review*, Autumn, 1957), in which the protagonist, a "word-man" recovering from the ill effects of surgery, becomes engrossed in studying the death of Keats, as revealed through Keats's letters. Here, by critically re-enacting the death of a "perfect" poet, the word-man in effect uses Keats as cathartic victim. But the cathartic principle is broken into other fragments also, as for instance, in shell-gathering, in speculations on the sea as life-giving charnel house, and in the change of scene, itself designed to be curative.

In Chapter XVIII of the *Poetics*, where Aristotle divides Attic tragedy into four species, the notion of "fragmentation" might be applied in a way that would make the alignment look slightly different. The species that Aristotle lists first (the Complex, or "entangled," *peplegmene*) could be treated as the paradigm; then the other three would be "fragmentations" of it. For insofar as tragedy involves suffering, a centering upon this element alone should lead to Aristotle's second species, the tragedy of suffering, the *pathetike*. (Plays about Ixion and Ajax, he says, are examples of the type.) The next important fragmentation would be the tragedy of character (*ethike*), presumably portraying tragic personality as such, though the examples mentioned have not survived. The lowest kind would stress spectacle (*opsis*). "All scenes laid in Hades" are examples of this emphasis—and by extension, this kind of fragmentation might cover the strictly "visionary" aspects of conversion. (The anchorite's choice of austere surroundings would thus be a "scenic fragmentation" of the cathartic motive.) In sum, type 1, the Complex kind of tragedy, would contain elements of suffering, character, and spectacle; but no one of these "fragments" would be isolated and given such special emphasis as make for the distinct literary species with Aristotle classes under the other three heads.

This approach might be carried further. Since, according to Aristotle, a Complex plot is distinguished by reversal and discovery, we note that the two taken together are the equivalent of "conversion," with the emergence of a new insight. In

fact, "discovery" is but a special and sometimes attenuated instance of "reversal" (since the new bit of knowledge acquired by the characters or the audience notably changes the nature of the motivation).⁴

Finally, as regards "fragmentation": just as each person undergoes experience in his own special way, meeting new conditions from the standpoint of a unique combination of past ones, hence with correspondingly unique bonds of association however great the range of attitudes he shares with other people, so each cathartic enterprise will involve developments peculiar to itself. Accordingly we cannot always be sure just which elements should be called essential to the catharsis, and which accidental. Thus, tentatively making an "existentialist" recipe for catharsis as contrived in Dante's *Purgatorio*, we might list "requirements" of this sort:

(1) The purgand, to be purged, must contemplate, as an engaged observer, the sufferings, regrets, and efforts of other people.

(2) He must proceed by orderly stages through the realms of the damned, the penitent, and the blessed, with each such stage divided into rationally distinguishable sub-stages.

⁴ As regards the six parts of tragedy named by Aristotle in Chapter VI of the *Poetics*: note that the *pathetike* could be said to stress one aspect of Plot, the *ethike* features Character, the *opsis*, Spectacle. "Discovery" (*anagnorisis*) can be considered a species of Thought (*dianoia*) insofar as it introduces a new perspective or point of view. We might say that it is Thought "implicitly" or "inchoately." For though the Discovery in itself may involve any change "from ignorance to knowledge" (xi), in the case of great dramas like Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* it "speaks volumes." As regards the other two parts, Diction (*lexis*) and Song (*melopoiia*): passages of lamentation and rejoicing chanted by the Chorus and capable of isolation like arias in an opera or like Psalms could be treated as fragments of these two parts. However, such lyric passages are not featured to the extent of becoming distinct tragic species—and in fact, as Aristotle reminds us in *Poetics* IV, 16, tragedy developed precisely by the curtailing of the role allotted to the Chorus in the earlier Dionysian rites.

However, I feel a bit uneasy about my treatment of "thought" in this line-up. And I'd like to try again, along these lines: (1) The complex plot would embody the perfect stress upon act. (2) The *pathetike* would stress the passive side of action. (3) The *ethike* would stress character. (4) The *opsis* (and the oldest text is corrupt at this point) would stress spectacle. Diction and song are omitted because the overstress upon them would mark a turn from drama proper back to lyric, the kind of arias-with-dance which drama had necessarily subordinated in the very process of becoming drama. And you can't get a drama at all by an overstress upon sheer thought. That would mark the point at which drama would dissolve into exposition, homily, or dialectic (for instance, the dialogue form which Plato offered as a kind of medicine quite different from the sort provided by the playwrights).

(3) He must have a male guide (a "father") whom he greatly admires; but behind this guide there must be a Madonna-like woman whom he had revered on earth, and whom he will see when he has been properly prepared.

(4) All stages of the purgation proper must be under the sign of blessing (as with the singing of a Beatitude in each circle of the Purificatory Mount, while he proceeds towards the Woman Who Blesses).

(5) The purgand's guide must generously keep him reminded that later there will be a change to a guide more highly qualified (an important point, because this arrangement in effect allows for a "transference" of allegiance without the need of "father-rejection").

(6) About midway in his development, spurred by study precisely at a time when most threatened by sloth, the purgand must have all motivation authoritatively reduced for him to terms of a single impulse ("love"), with its corresponding problems and hierarchy.

(7) He must accept a distinction in kind between a "natural" and a "spiritual" or "rational" order of motives. And maybe we should treat as cathartically essential the etymologically accidental fact that the root of the word for the "higher" kind of motive ("*d'animo*"—*Purg.* xvii, 93) also provides a generic term for the lower kind: "animal."

(8) He must have so strong a sense of wonder that references to wonder recur like an *idée fixe* throughout the text.

(9) He must have confronted a basic conflict of authorities (spiritual and temporal), where the spiritual authorities are in a state of corruption that he looks upon as infecting the temporal.

(10) At stages along the way, the purgand must have dreams that foreshadow the course of his development.

(11) He must accept it without question that people are cleansed by willingly undergoing hardships to make amends for previous laxities.

(12) He must forever be pressing onwards and upwards, despite occasional lapses.

(13) At every stage, there must be a language of imagery corresponding to a language of ideas—and these ideas must have their explicit expression, too, not being merely suggested through their imagistic counterparts.

VI

The principle of "fragmentation" ultimately involves a terministic situation we have already considered elsewhere, notably in connection with the "Cycle of Terms Implicit in the Idea of 'Order,'" in our essay on Genesis. If one term implies several others that are necessary to its meaning, there is no one sequence proper to such a family of terms. Thus, implicit in the idea of catharsis as cure there is the idea of disease, implicit in its meaning as an unburdening there is the idea of a load or charge, implicit in its meaning as a cleansing there is the idea of the unclean. And any such ideas would be translatable into corresponding images.

The spinning can be carried further: if there is a cleansing, there must be persons or things that do the cleansing, and there must be the offscourings that result from the cleansing. Implicit here, in turn, is the idea of the need to dispose of the offscourings, or in some way to neutralize their bad effects. And there is also the idea of so extending the cathartic principle that those persons who are entrusted with the cleansing must themselves be cleansed in preparation for their office and perhaps also following the performance of the awful rites. Also, there must be situations marked by clean and unclean essences, with perhaps situations that are ambiguous and can thereby form transitional bridges between the opposite kinds of terms. Further, each of such moments along the way may be epitomized in some particular object or image that is the visible or tangible manifestation of a certain invisible, intangible essence, and thus secondarily a manifestation of the terministic reticulation which that essence in turn implies.

Or, reverting to a step already mentioned, we find implicit in the idea of offscourings the idea of substitution or vicarage whereby one thing becomes unclean as a result of the process whereby another is cleansed. (Thus, if the purifying bath is one kind of "fulfillment," the impure bath-water is another.) Here are the sheerly terministic makings of the "scapegoat principle"; for at the very least the vessel that bears these

impurities must itself need purifying. And of course the principle of vicarage makes also for an accountancy whereby the victim designed to suffer vicariously for others may in turn be replaced by a substitute.

We could go on, "spinning" a whole world of implications from such a start (with cuts similar "in principle," but different in detail, according to the connotations uppermost in such pairs, half-idea, half-image, as sick vs. cured, burdened vs. unburdened, enslaved vs. free, lost vs. found, unclean vs. clean, tense vs. relaxed, etc.).

The subject of "fragmentation" also impinges upon a matter we have considered previously in another connection: the kind of "futurity" that is intensely experienceable as an intuition here and now, and that can be due purely to a terministic situation. We refer to the fact that one can feel a whole universe of terms vibrant in the key term he chooses as his point of departure. We mentioned the writings of a convert such as Paul, who spun his terminology from the essentially cathartic principle of Christ as Mediator by reason of His nature as Perfect Victim. We noted that, regardless of the intense conviction Paul derived from the circumstances of his conversion on the road to Damascus, there was the sheerly technical urgency of his nomenclature, as each term drives imperatively towards others implicit in it. In his writings one often finds sentences that transform such terministic spinning into the figure technically known as *gradatio*, or the ladder, thus: "But we glory in tribulation also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope." Or again: "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." From the standpoint of terministic implications, this second sentence, for instance, would be a highly dramatized way of saying that the ideas of predestination, vocation, justification, and glorification mutually imply one another. Similarly, from the standpoint of terministic cyclicity, one should approach a play such as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* not by asking how King Oedipus' unconscious parricide and incest resulted in the

condition of pollution under which the populace suffered and which could be alleviated only by his sacrifice, as brought about by such-and-such developments. Rather, one should ask how the ideas of kingship, parricide, incest, pollution, justice, and royal cathartic sacrifice all implied one another. Obviously, though the Freudian perspective would help us in making such an alignment, it could not wholly supply the answer.

So far as the paradigm of catharsis is concerned, if we center for a time upon its most common associations, we might say that it contains the "simultaneously present" ideas of these main moments: "unclean," "clean," "cleansing," "cleanser," and "cleansed." And though we might say that in catharsis as an *act* ("cleansing") there is implied a progression in one direction (from "unclean" to "clean"—or, similarly, from "burdened" to "unburdened," or from "enslaved" to "free," etc.) a closer look shows that this irreversibility is more apparent than real. For instance, insofar as the idea of catharsis is objectified in terms of offscourings (*katharmata*), there is a sense in which the cleaning has led to the unclean. Or, otherwise put: the unclean is either displaced, or "covered." And this principle of removal introduces in effect the principle of substitution, or vicarage, since the cleansing of one place incidentally involves the polluting of another.

Once this principle of vicarage is introduced, you have a terministic situation that makes possible a development in two directions at once: while the tragic protagonist may be proceeding from good fortune to bad, his simulated assumption of such a destiny may be so contrived formally and stylistically that the audience is proceeding from irresolution to resolution. (Or, if you will, the play embodies a counterpoint whereby these two strands work together.) And just at the stage where the victim is imitating the most intense suffering, the audience is cleansed by a bath of pitiful tears, a benign orgasmic downpour.

Partially as a result of the fact that the particular irreversible details of one cathartic drama are so different from those of another, some persons may contend that the catharsis of a

drama is purely intrinsic to its form, and is not to be explained as borrowing part of its tensions from clearly or vaguely felt analogies to personal situations outside the play (the various individual "private dramas" which the members of the audience have in the back of their minds when they come to the theatre, and to which they will revert when the play is over). And unquestionably, whether or not the dramatist draws on such "unearned increment" for part of his effect, the drama must be analyzed first of all as a process intrinsically cathartic. But insofar as the cathartic process is purely intrinsic to the given drama, then that drama must somehow contrive within its own terms to establish a sense of the unclean—for how otherwise could there be a sense of cleansing? At the very least, insofar as the play begins by working up a tangle which must be untangled, this development from complication to *dénouement* must in some way set up a resolution to be resolved—and it must do so in accordance with norms of propriety that also prevail *outside* the given work, however unique the set of proprieties embodied *within* the work.

VII

But could we have a sufficiently comprehensive approach to the problem of catharsis if we treated it solely in such a purely formalistic manner? "Pity and fear and such emotions" are strongly personal, they do something to one personally—and we must consider not only the personalities of the *dramatis personae* but also the over-all "personality" of a given drama (for such "character" sums up the ways in which the tragic imitation itself can be said to *act*). Though a drama, to be successful, certainly need not allude to strictly local situations (as with "tendentious" plots that exploit our sympathies regarding social or political issues that happen at the time to be prominent in the news), surely its over-all enactment, and the roles by which such enactment is made possible, are most effective when in some way they sum up human tensions prevailing "prior to" the particular circumstances of the par-

ticular tragedy that happens to be "cleansing" us. The sense of an "uncleanness" that needs "cleansing" can be suggested within the terms of a particular drama only insofar as we can somehow "meet it halfway," by responding with susceptibilities we have developed through experiences outside the drama.

In this way a dramatist's trickeries, while ostensibly resolving nothing but entanglements of his own making, may be *symbolically* or *metaphorically* resolving problems that are *literally* unresolvable, since they relate ultimately to motivational tangles that cannot be resolved, except insofar as we might class under "resolution" such blanket attitudes as piety, resignation, defiance, dissipation, and either outright sloth or the more common variants of sloth that conceal themselves beneath much show of activity. The character, or personality of a work may touch upon such ultimate discordances natural to a given society; or it may to varying degrees transcend the culture in which it arose, and may "permanently" engage the human tribe in general (for in proportion as we perfect our understanding of these processes, surely we shall see how all great works are feeling their way through much the same astounding labyrinth).

People are "cleansed" in one respect when, after indecision, they hit upon a course of action. They are cleansed in another respect when they become so intensely "inside" to a symbol-system that a new quality or order of motives emerges from within it. And they are cleansed in still another respect when, the goal having been reached, fulfillment is complete. Each has its own kind of gratification, corresponding to the beginning, middle, and end of a project. They are purely formal aspects of catharsis that do not directly involve victimage. However, we need but think of the *Divine Comedy* to realize how readily the cathartic process, as given full body, comes to develop out of victimage.

The Inferno is the realm of hopelessness, as per the often quoted formula, III, 9: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here" (*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate*). It is a region where the shrieks are "desperate" (I, 115). Thus, essentially,

it would be a realm without direction. Yet, after the brief introduction, it is what gets the poem under way. There is thus a sense in which Dante is never really in Hell, since he is progressing towards Beatrice. His Hell is but a kind of Pre-Purgatory, as Beatrice says in effect when she tells him (*Purg.* XXX, 136-138): He had sunk so low, the only way of saving him was "to show him the lost people" (*mostrargli le perduti genti*). In effect, she was proposing that he become better acquainted with the eternal scapegoats that will match the saints eternally cleansed. And as regards the purely "formal" equivalent of Hell, Dante, the poet, had already passed beyond it, and into the motives of Purgatory (catharsis proper) once he had formed a clear idea of Hell's structure and of the stages through which Dante the pilgrim would proceed—or, more specifically, once he had hit upon that resonant first line (on being midway along life's journey, *Nel mezzo del camin di nostra vita*), a line that in itself suggests a peripety at the very start.

Quite as the region of Hell is in a sense *raised* to the level of catharsis by reason of the purpose or destination implicit in the realization that we are witnessing a guided tour *through* it, so by the same token there is a sense in which Heaven is *lowered* to the level of catharsis. For the Paradiso is not so much an ultimate consummation pure and simple as a kind of *Gradus ad Parnassum*, an educational progression through a series of steps each of which is a consummation in its own right, though all are mutually related in a kind of fixity quite unlike the temporal or narrative development Dante's journey imparts to them. It would be like saying that the squares on a checkerboard "go" from one to the next, as you move a checker across them. Even in Heaven, Dante is on the make. Thus, though the dialectic of Hell and Heaven is "frozen" in the sense that all relationships are permanently set, by the nature of his journey through them, Dante endows all three realms with the "progressive" quality of Purgatory.

However, within this qualification, we might say that Hell is indecision, Purgatory is decision, and Heaven is the arrival that follows decision persevered in. While the inmates of

Purgatory (the realm that in effect has "catharsis" in its very name) are under great discomfiture, their sufferings have the satisfaction of being *purposive*. The shades in Purgatory are "contented in the fire" (*contenti nel fuoco*), for they "hope to come" eventually "among the blessed." In purgation as so conceived, the suffering must be *willed*. One is not "cleansed" when acting under duress; his engagements, however *necessary*, must also somehow be *free*.

VIII

To complete these pages on "fragmentation," we might recall another major moment, as regards the redemptive logic. We saw how, as one aspect of tragic dignification, there is the use of Wonder. Wonder is not directly related to either Love or Pity, though we noted how it could be related to Pity indirectly, by reason of its relation to Fear. (In *Permanence and Change*, Hermes Edition, p. 145, we first tinkered with this notion, in linking Wonder, Reverence, Awe, Fear, and Dread, while ideas of Defense and Courage or Cowardice are in the offing). A related motive operates in the step from Wonder to Admiration. For the desire to build a character who is "good" for sacrifice as tragic hero can readily lead to the desire to make him "admirable." Next, a "moment" of this sort could build up requirements of its own, to the point where representative critics even questioned whether tragedy, as so conceived, really aimed at "catharsis." The Cornelian dramatist might so build up the appeal of this one moment in its own terms, that the direct relation to catharsis retreated behind the desire to be *imposing*. The shift is understandable sociologically, for though such drama was a State art, and thus to some extent like the Greek drama, it was a *court* art rather than a *civic* art. Or at least we could say that it was "on the slope" of court art. Might the effect, then, be more like that of witnessing a parade (a royal *cortège*) than like being made to feel that the interests of the high and the lowly were somehow one? Also, ironically enough, on looking back at the form in the light of what happened later, do we not see how

it could be analyzed as implicitly containing the expression of emergent tendencies towards *revolt*? That is, these tendencies were present not as in Aeschylus, who seems deliberately to have sought ways to neutralize them, but rather as trends that were "creeping up" on the dramatists, and that thus got in by stealth (owing to the fact that drama requires a conflict, and insofar as the Cornelian drama became a *court* art, the enacting of conflict would involve, however roundabout, the introduction of motives *contrary* to the court).

In the introduction to the American Edition of *Les Chefs-d'Oeuvre de Corneille*, annotated by Georges Raeders, we are informed:

The audience and readers of the eighteenth century were much exercised for or against the political theories expressed by the characters in *Cinna*.

To one, *Cinna* was "fanaticism and demagoguery crushed by the social and conservative spirit"; to another, it was "royalty made divine by mercy, the apotheosis of monarchy"; to a third, *Cinna* disclosed "both the secret of the building of the empire and the cause of its duration"; others reconciled all these views by showing that the piece "develops the republican idea in the early acts and the monarchic idea in the later ones."

Its version of imperial clemency is said to have been such a favorite with Louis XIV, that, on seeing it performed, he wanted to pardon a chevalier condemned to death, but his ministers insisted that such a policy would set a bad example.

All told, as catharsis it seems better designed to soften an absolute monarch than to mollify a disgruntled populace. From the standpoint of a cathartic "moment" that had developed sufficient independence as a motive all its own to lose direct relevance to catharsis (except perhaps for the King and the dramatist), we might state the case thus: Tragedy, to be most cathartically effective, builds "heroic" characters; Cornelian tragedy develops a cult of the heroic as such—and this makes for a theatre of "admiration" (while admiration could in turn be treated as a variant of the "wonder" that Aristotle considered helpful to the effectiveness of tragedy).

IX

This second view of catharsis derives partly from a shift of models (when we began, for instance, to ask about the cathartic ingredients in Pauline Christianity). But mainly it comes from a question that arose regarding Aristotle's own definition.

In the *Rhetoric* (II, iii) he observes that "it is impossible to be afraid and angry at the same time." He seems to mean that in proportion as we feel angry with someone, our fear drops away—and presumably if one were angry enough, one would attack in a rage, without thought of the consequences.

Thus, when considering Greek tragedy from the standpoint of a catharsis got by the symbolic cleansing of civic conflict, we saw that this formula of Aristotle's was quite relevant to our concerns. For it suggested that the tragedy might contrive to make us fear for the very class of citizen against whom we might otherwise feel angry (the socially superior).

At that point we noticed another twist: in II, iv, Aristotle distinguishes between anger and hate, by saying that we feel angry with individuals ("for instance Callias or Socrates"), whereas hatred applies to *classes* of people ("for instance, everyone hates a thief or an informer"). He next says that anger can be cured by time, but it is not so with hatred. He also says that anger is painful, but hatred is not.

The general picture suggested the thought that, insofar as civic conflict involved *class* conflicts, the modes of heroic personalization would first move the issue from the realm of hatred to the realm of anger. Next, the resources of fear would be so manipulated that tendencies to fear would replace the tendencies to anger. The dramatist would contrive this shift by depicting his heroes as the victims of greater misfortune than their misdeeds merited, and by bringing the intensity of their sufferings before our very eyes (*enargeia*), since the more remote a danger seems, the less it is feared. At this point we noted that both anger and hatred were on the slope opposite that of *love*. Here then, we thought, might be a deflection to provide for a problematical absence of love.

And the next step was to observe how the arousing of pity might serve the same end, except in a more "positive" way.

Throughout the inquiry, the author has been tentatively asking himself just how to present the other two major cathartic devices, epitomized in Aristophanic comedy and Platonist dialectic (with the non-dramatic lyric, as distinguished from the tragic chorus, being in turn viewed as a variant of Platonic transcendence).

And now of a sudden the remainder of the task falls neatly into place. Aristophanes' priapic comedy was in its very essence vowed to peace (a variant of love, coming to a conclusion in a secularization of the sacred marriage and the love-feast). And Plato's particular system of cure, which put him in direct competition with both tragic and comic playwrights, was based on the Socratic erotic, as propounded most directly in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*: an ideological technique whereby bodily love would be transformed into love of wisdom, which in turn would be backed by knowledge derived and matured from the coquettish give and take of verbal intercourse.

A BURNED TOAST TO THE AMERICAN THEATRE

Oscar Mandel

I

I WILL ASSUME AS A POINT of departure (where the reader can leave me at once if he disagrees) that the American theatre occupies a low rank in the World Assembly of drama, past and present. And I will suppose furthermore that American drama, taken as a whole, has given a less brilliant account of itself than American poetry, fiction, and criticism. We have every right to wonder whether the names flaunted today—our Tennessee Williams, our Arthur Miller—or that of our infirm giant O'Neill—or those heard yesterday and already receding, will not be joining all too soon the frightening troop registered rather than preserved in the *Literary History of the United States*: James A. Herne, Bronson Howard, Augustus Thomas, Clyde Fitch, William Vaughn Moody, and the rest of those the world forgets.

We are always looking, of course, for the new star. Who is readier to worship than the critic? A year ago or two, the reviewers were hailing Archibald MacLeish's *J.B.* There seemed to be a certain gratitude in the air for the fact that the play dealt with a Question, that it (almost) made one think, and that there were no lads in it whose growth had been stunted by unaffectionate fathers. But the intellection of *J.B.* proved negligible after all; MacLeish's attempt to finagle Evil away by making John love Mary was less than immortal theatre. In fact, American drama had not come of age yet. Nor has it come of age since. The search for radiance continues.

In the following pages I intend to suggest an answer to the question of what ails our theatre, but I intend also to proceed beyond this to a formulation—or rather a reformula-

tion, for there is little news under the sun of aesthetics—of certain axioms for the theatre, and to a survey of the means at our disposal for making the axiomatic practical. But I will limit the subject to “serious” plays rather than “comic” plays, even though the line of demarcation between these genres has become harder and harder to trace.

What kind of explanation ought we to seek, once we suppose the mediocrity of our drama? Should it be a sociological or an aesthetic one? Either avenue might be taken. Sociologically speaking, we would note that drama is no longer a national art; that the majority of the population lives without it and does not miss it; that drama has been replaced by the film and by television; that genius (like mediocrity) goes where money lies at hand, but that the money given by television and the cinema stifles genius. In short, a “cultural” explanation for the poverty of the American theatre might be sought and perhaps found, and both search and discovery would be infinitely interesting. The problem would expand almost at once, and the inquirer would demand to know why the British have had so few composers, why the Russians in the 19th century wrote great novels but painted bad paintings, or why German music is greater than Italian music, composer for composer and type for type. The aim of these inquiries would by no means be to satisfy or to confound foreign ministries, but to tap the mysterious psycho-social sources of aesthetic fertility. Hardly a beginning has been made in such studies. And nothing further, I regret to say, will be offered here.

My own inquiry, then, confines itself to aesthetics. I ask what the mistake has been, rather than why, historically, it was (or had to be) made. Now an answer which is sometimes given—I believe Mr. Gore Vidal, among others, has offered it—is that our drama is intellectually underdeveloped. And the fact as such can hardly be denied. Our only playwright whose thought is that of the intellectual at the peak of his functions is T. S. Eliot, and he is not among us, perhaps not rightfully ours at all. If we dare use as touchstone “the best that has been thought and said in the world,” the others—

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our best—make a poor showing indeed. What intelligence plays in *Winterset*, in *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, in *View from the Bridge*, in *Come Back, Little Sheba*? Of feeling there is plenty, there is even too much; and of righteous indignation, and honesty, and a determination to reveal, to bare, to disclose; but sheer mind at the peak of its functions is absent. For American tragedy is domestic rather than philosophic. Its typical protagonist is Marty, looking for somebody to hug him. Try as he will, O'Neill (for example) cannot make the cosmic dimension which he pulls into his plays stick: they remain bourgeois pseudo-tragedies in the vein, not of *King Lear*, but of *A Woman Kill'd with Kindness*.

And it is also a characteristic of our drama that its population is on the whole primitive. For the first time in the history of the theatre, the cultivated audience is listening to the incoherences of its intellectual inferiors not in comedies like *Much Ado About Nothing*, but in the most serious drama. It has been too easily supposed up to now that this has been an important step forward, in civilization as well as in art. Without making conclusions at this point, we must at least recognize the fact: in the past the intellectual stature of tragic protagonists was simply taken for granted (theory does not even bother to notice it); but in our own serious drama I think we can point only to Eliot's characters as consistently and genuinely intelligent.

O'Neill, it is true, repeatedly attempts to put intellectuals on stage; but no one will deny, I believe, that the result is ludicrous. The level at which O'Neill's educated personages operate can be gauged by the following speech made by Professor Leeds in *Strange Interlude*: "It isn't Gordon, Charlie, it's his memory, his ghost, you might call it, haunting Nina, whose influence I have come to dread because of the terrible change in her attitude towards me." Or by that of another intellectual, Dion Anthony (in *The Great God Brown*): "The pride which came after man's fall—by which he laughs as a creator at his self-defeats!" Or another "wearily bitter" aphorism

by the same sensitive genius: "I'll take the job. One must do something to pass away the time, while one is waiting—for one's next incarnation." Or any of the speeches of still another of O'Neill's delicate and soulful poets, Robert Mayo in *Beyond the Horizon*; for example, "It's just Beauty that's calling me, the beauty of the far off and unknown, the mystery and spell of the East, which lures me in the books I've read, the need of the freedom of great wide spaces, the joy of wandering on and on—in quest of the secret which is hidden just over there, beyond the horizon."

I believe it would be hard to find, either in O'Neill or in our other authors, passages much more interesting or illuminating than these. But I will return to the whole question of intelligence in theme and intelligence in dialogue in the sequel. For the moment I only enter my agreement with those who complain of intellectual deficiencies in our drama. And yet I deny that this is the heart of the trouble. I deny, for example, that an infusion of first-rate ideas into our present mode of writing plays would give us first-rate theatre. Splendid plays can be written on minor themes and even with mediocre dialogue; and conversely (it goes without saying), a soundly philosophical work can be artistically a bad work. Poor as they are, the concepts of our dramatists are adequate to great, though not the greatest, drama.

II

Not mental vacuity is at fault, then, but something else, for which we can use the convenient name of naturalism. Now for my purpose here, I do not define naturalism in terms of a stage which copies the three walls and the interior of a house. I think it does not matter very much whether the sets are realistic or symbolic, and whether blue or white lights are used. I call serious naturalistic art—and I limit myself to serious art—that *which attempts to reproduce in the audience the very shock (or horror, or nausea, or revolt) which the events would produce were they real*. And I call expres-

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sionistic and heroic art the two forms of art which seek primarily the effect of aesthetic pleasure.

The aberration of naturalistic art is unconsciously summarized in two sentences written by Mr. Norman Mailer to introduce a play of his recently printed in part by one of our reviews. "My desire," says Mr. Mailer, "was to see how far one could engage and then exacerbate the conventional emotions of an average audience. The portion extracted here includes those scenes which would be most unbearable for such an audience." In Greece, once upon a time, a man might be fined or exiled for "exacerbating the conventional emotions of an average audience"—witness Phrynichus' misadventure with his *Capture of Miletus*. But nowadays the artist has taken over from the preacher or prophet the unpleasant task of righteous irritation. We are in effect given an odious choice by our writers: either the art is popular, sentimental, and mendacious, and then it entertains, or the art is serious, analytic, and truthful, and then it appalls. Is the time past when the ugliest truth could be told in a play which still delighted? Is the old maxim, that art must instruct by delighting, obsolete? Not so, at any rate, in Europe. It is only in America, after naturalism has been dealt enough theoretical blows to stun any form of art out of existence, that the practice of naked horror still prevails, and that writers like Mr. Mailer suppose it an achievement to nauseate an audience.

It is not the term naturalism itself which matters, of course: I am concerned with the quintessence of American drama—the exact reproduction, in serious plays, of the shock of sordid experience—and it happens that naturalism is a convenient term for this. Some critics seem to think that because of a few unrealistic tricks, a few effects which violate time-sequence or the sensory reception of reality ("lurid reflections appear on the walls in odd, sinuous shapes," and the like), American drama has flown from the cage of realism. In *Our Town* and in *The Glass Menagerie*, we meet with commentators who peer at the scene for us; O'Neill plays

with masks in *The Great God Brown* and interior voices in *Strange Interlude*; Elmer Rice ruffles chronology in *On Trial*; Anderson cuts lines to look like poetry; but this is the world of gimmickry, and at bottom we remain where Ibsen began. Naturalism is not disheartened by these minor retreats.

The Glass Menagerie is a good case in point. In fact, it could well serve as a dismal prototype of our drama: the usual children-parents troubles, the usual frustrations, the usual pseudo-profundities ("all these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation"), the usual sentimentalities ("You asked me once if I'd ever liked a boy. Don't you remember I showed you this boy's picture?"). But Williams would have us believe that he has made a bold departure from naturalism. "The scene is memory and therefore nonrealistic," he informs us in the opening stage direction; and his commentator, Tom (a poet from the same school as Dion Anthony), repeats the recipe for the slow ones among us: "The play is memory. Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic"—a piece of characteristic prose, by the way, for a time when men who can write write poetry or novels, not plays. A few moments later, we are informed that "Eating is indicated by gestures without food or utensils," and that, it would seem, is the final triumph (borrowed from Thornton Wilder) against naturalism. Unfortunately, the situation of the play and the dialogue supply the merciless truth of the matter:

TOM. Look, Mother—I haven't got a thing, not a single thing left in this house that I can call my own.

AMANDA. Lower your voice!

TOM. Yesterday you confiscated my books! You had the nerve to—

AMANDA. I did. I took that horrible novel back to the library—that awful book by that insane Mr. Lawrence. I cannot control the output of a diseased mind or people who cater to them, but I won't allow such filth in my house. No, no, no, no, no!

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TOM. House, house! Who pays the rent on the house, who makes a slave of himself to—

AMANDA. Don't you dare talk to me like that!

TOM. No, I musn't say anything! *I've* just got to keep quiet and let you do all the talking.

AMANDA. Let me tell you something!

TOM. I don't want to hear anymore.

Does anyone? Can anyone? Is it so American drama competes with the ages? And is this the finale of Aeschylus, Corneille, and Goethe? Scenes fit for a reporter in Domestic Court? Stenographic copies of kitchenette backbiting? Be that as it may, a play like *The Glass Menagerie*, for all its contraptions, is in one category with *Street Scene* and *Death of a Salesman*, and not with Ionesco or Brecht.

It is true that O'Neill, for one, tried several times to transcend naturalism. We have from his pen downright naturalistic plays like *Beyond the Horizon*, *Anna Christie*, *S. S. Glencairn*, *Gold*, and *Desire Under the Elms*; mislucked attempts to go farther, like *Strange Interlude* and *The Great God Brown*; and a few plays which are indeed expressionistic or heroic. Thus in *Emperor Jones* and *Hairy Ape*, O'Neill gave promise of new times for our drama, though he could not, as it turned out, redeem the pledge; and in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, he wrote as nearly a *grand* play as anyone in America ever did. The characters here seem, for once, to be greater than normal—they are always about to transcend the common reality of the naturalists, even if it is questionable whether they quite succeed. Unfortunately, the play is marred by certain stupidities—like the naive pushing of Freud into our consciousness at every step and the comical horrors of the denouement—and by the soap opera realism from which neither O'Neill nor Williams nor Miller can altogether escape. Orin's bright and furious "Murdering doesn't improve one's manners!"—not great wit but the best O'Neill can offer in the way of intellectual talk—is quickly followed by "Gosh, Mother, it feels so darned good to be home with you!", which lands us back into the life of *Ah Wilderness!*

These three plays are, at any rate, laudable flights from naturalism. But others are less fortunate. Plays like *Lazarus Laughed* and *Marco Millions* merely embarrass the reader with their pedestrian pomposities and their provincialism. What shall we say of a work in which a crucified lion licks the hand of Lazarus and *smiles* as he dies? where Lazarus' laughter "seems now to have attained the most exultant heights of spiritual affirmation"? where Miriam says "I begin to feel horror gnawing at my breast"? As for *The Fountain*, another historical play, it is a work of which too little can be said. O'Neill managed, difficult as the task must have been, to write worse costume drama than Maxwell Anderson.

A reading of O'Neill's purely naturalistic drama convinces one that only here was he really at home; naturalism is his proper idiom; and he returns to it even when he has wandered off the farthest. Not the least successful pages of *Mourning Becomes Electra*, for example, are those in which the yokels converse; and the near-greatness of *The Hairy Ape* is owing to the fact that O'Neill contrived in this case to use the naturalistic idiom, much as Beckett has done since, in the service of allegory. Again, we feel in the decidedly minor sketches of *S.S. Glencairn* that O'Neill is laboring in his own homely field, whereas in, say, *Marco Millions*, he tries to speak a language he does not know. As for *Strange Interlude* and *The Great God Brown*, the expressionistic devices cannot mask their essential naturalism. Any passage will demonstrate this:

NINA (*Frightened—angrily*). Don't be stupid, Ned! That isn't so at all! I hate you when you talk that way!

DARRELL (*Cynically*). Hate me, exactly. As he does! That's what I'm advising you to do if you want to keep his love! (*He smiles grimly*).

NINA (*Sharply*). If Gordon doesn't love you it's because you've never made the slightest attempt to be lovable to him! There's no earthly reason why he should like you, when you come right down to it, Ned! Take to-day, for instance. It's his birthday, but you'd forgotten, or didn't care! You never even brought him a present.

It staggers one to think that these trivialities, in the same trivial prose, are spread over a play three times the length of an ordinary work for the theatre. O'Neill had a penchant for endlessness which might be excused only in a Homer. But the point here is that O'Neill's departures from naturalism are simply incidents in his career. And this holds true for American drama at large. Exceptions come to mind, of course, some ludicrous (like Anderson's pseudo-poetry), and a few successful. If we can claim *Murder in the Cathedral* as American drama, we have at least one masterpiece to show. *The Skin of our Teeth* is another acceptable piece of expressionism on a serious theme, marred most unfortunately by a discursive third act; Jeffers' Greek plays should be noted as well—his *Medea* demonstrates that an artist can still use the heroic style without lapsing into archaism; *Green Pastures*—surely more than pure comedy—is another jewel in our modest tiara; and best of all, perhaps, is Rice's *The Adding Machine*, the native triumph in serious (or serio-comic) expressionistic dramaturgy.

A certain number of other fairly successful plays which play serious themes could be cited. Even *J.B.* is not altogether a failure. But these are all honorable deserters from the main body. Rice's characteristic play, for example, is *Street Scene*—perhaps, with the possible exception of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the best naturalistic play written in this country. Williams, too, tried his hand at expressionism and produced that boring monster, *Camino Real*, before he returned to the native vein he exploits so well. So well: for it would be foolish to deny that very interesting naturalistic plays can be written. *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *A View from the Bridge*, *Street Scene*, and even now and then *Desire Under the Elms*—all these are plays which grip us—while they last—just as a horrifying newsreel grips us. Who can be untouched by a father going insane because of an unadmitted incestuous passion for his daughter, when father, daughter, mother are speaking the very language and making the very gestures real people are speaking and making this moment in every house of the city? And better, after all, a solid piece

of mediocre realism like *Detective Story* than pseudo-heroic bombast or a pretentious and unintelligible failure in the expressionistic theatre; better Inge's *Picnic* than Genêt's *Balcon*. But when this much is granted—and to grant less would be fanaticism—the argument's gravamen remains untouched: naturalism is a disease of art.

III

What, at bottom, does the aberration of naturalism consist in? One answer is that it tends to use the work of art in order to look at truth instead of using truth to arrive at pleasure. The woman who remarked, after a performance of *A Hatful of Rain*, that "she had certainly learned a lot of things about dope addicts she hadn't known before" made, in fact, the only suitable (and devastating) comment possible about that play; as did the reviewer for the *New Yorker* concerning another revelation of naked truth, Jack Gelber's *The Connection*: "The imitation of addiction is authentic to the point of raising one's hair." What would this same reviewer think of a painter who reproduced a cypress tree so vividly that "one could almost take the leaves in hand"? Curious it is that an artistic method long abandoned by all but the most trivial painters should still be the dominant mode in our theatre. Van Gogh does not use the art of painting in order to arrive at an exact conception of a cypress, but—need we be reminded?—uses the cypress to create a pleasurable event new to the world.

This does not mean that truth—the real cypress—can be dispensed with altogether, and that the new pleasurable event can be made of any building block whatsoever. An occasional play without any relevance to simple external reality is conceivable, but one doubts whether a *genre* of non-representational plays could ever come into existence. The verbal arts occupy a position at the extreme right of painting and music as far as relation to external reality is concerned. Music does not need any sounds found in nature. The painter, however, can choose his building blocks from nature or out of

nature as he pleases. But were the literary man to create a play with "meaningless" sentences and "unintelligible" paragraphs, he would be as limited and as exceptional as a composer attempting the opposite, namely to create a symphony relying entirely on noises from the street, the country, and the zoo.

Contact with what goes simply and commonly under the name of reality, then, is a necessity for the theatre (and by the same token, for all verbal art-forms). And there is no reason why a playwright should not deal with dope addicts or incestuous relations. But he will fail if he believes that his first mission is to tell us the truth about these questions; for his first mission is to amuse us (in the highest sense of that word) by the *use* of these questions. The truth itself is limp in his hands. It will perform its function as art only if it can—I use the word again—amuse; and it can amuse only if the *artifice* which expresses it is attractive.

We are back with the old maxim, which is also a paradox, that art must instruct by delighting. It is a paradox because the instruction is often of things evil and ugly; then how can the work also delight? The answer is that the delight lies in the artifice. Art is truth artficed. And the main question for our playwrights is therefore how to incarnate the bitterest truth—for truth must be held fast—in a delightful artifact. The mere imposition of story-form (beginning, middle, climax, and end) or a few stage-tricks will obviously not suffice. Our audiences are too sophisticated to be astonished and charmed by a cunning piece of dramatic irony or a craftsmanlike denouement.

If we are to draw such an audience from, say, the concert hall, where artifice reigns beyond challenge, we must provide just that: artifice. The serious writer will not allow the artifice, the game, to destroy truth; but today at any rate he must be even more careful not to let truth destroy the game. He must give his audience a few hours of the marvelous, the amazing, the splendid, the far-fetched, the beautiful—any of these, or any other, as long as it is more than the snapshot of truth. Art is not nor ever was "a mirror held up to nature"—

and Shakespeare never said so; he was speaking of acting, not literature, and he was rather wrong even there.

"If nothing else," writes one of our critics, referring to the Osbornes of England, "they will stick to the facts and rhythms of modern life. In the new plays toast is burned, clothes are ironed, bobs have to be found for the gas-meter, the empties have to be returned to the pub. . . . And most important, they [the personages] talk like living people." This—the Muse forgive our man—this is then the glory of the modern stage: toast is burned on it, and the actors talk like real people! This misery is to be the achievement of genius; with heaving and sweating, equipped with the paraphernalia of the ages, we are to climb to the height of a molehill. The unfortunate Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Racine, and Schiller were born too early for this gospel. Was Romeo to have told Juliet, "Geezes, you're a dish, you know that?" Or, on reaching the balcony, "Gimme a kiss, honey"?

The people who attend the serious theatre today are in a strange position. They dress carefully; the husband wears a fashionable suit, his wife dabs on her skin the finest perfumes she has. Full of merriment, they ride in a taxi to the theatre, greet their friends, smoke a cigarette before the performance in the lobby or the street—the lights blaze, people bustle, chat, laugh—a general satisfaction prevails. They take their seats—good plush—the elaborate chandelier (an imitation, no doubt, of something old and French) wanes, and the curtain rises on—*Long Day's Journey Into Night*! Gradually our elegant and joyous couple wilt. For three or four hours, an eminent American playwright—the eminent American playwright—puts them to the torture so that they may obtain "an insight into reality." And what an insight! A mother who takes dope, a tubercular son, a suicidal other son, a jack-of-all-noise father—mutual hatred, morbid love, hysterical weeping, soul-clawing—all exposed with "ruthless honesty" as though we were, not theatre-goers, but members of a jury. Eventually, the ordeal is over; the truth has been taught, and the curtain is lowered. The spectators, obedient to their superego, make believe they have enjoyed them-

selves enormously. "How different from those Broadway frivolities. We are above all that." Our couple shuffle miserably out of the theatre. They droop homeward, their spirits quite dashed, but assured of having received a profound revelation concerning human nature; while the reviewers, properly awe-struck by the horror of it all, pay homage in their columns to the master.

But against the O'Neillism of the land, we proclaim (with the voice of many centuries) that if the truth is sad, the work of art is not. The play's business is no more to reproduce burned toast or "Come over with Elena for a drink" than Stravinsky's business is to reproduce the sound of a tugboat. The role of the artist is to transcend truth and keep truth at the same time; to expose misery and yet entertain; to hug reality and yet be utterly unreal. He will not let his audience forget that toast can be burned, but he will perish rather than express this by burning a piece of toast on stage.

It is with this sense of entering a different world—of leaving burned toast behind; this sense of the incipient marvelous, the royally fun, the awesomely grand; this sense of the special occasion; that the Athenian tribes took their seats at the Greater Dionysia; that the apprentices escaped from the shop, crossed the Thames, and elbowed for a spot in the Globe; that *la cour et la ville* heard the rhymed but passionate oratory of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Needless to say, this difference from the everyday—this artifice—can be created in endless ways, each period to its own. Pirandello, Brecht, Anouilh, Ghelderode, Ionesco, the Elmer Rice of *The Adding Machine*, Genêt, Beckett, and scores of others have invented marvels for this century. It remains for the best American playwrights to carry out the lesson.

The axiom we conclude with is that pain in the subject matter and pain in the aesthetic response are two clearly separable events. The painful subject is compatible with a joyous experience. Neither the sentimentalist nor the naturalist has grasped this fact. The sentimentalist tries to cheer his audience by forcing cheer into his subject. The naturalist renders the intolerable of life into an intolerable experience.

But the true artist wrangles aesthetic joy for us out of the most intransigent revelation of misery. The problem, in fact, is not whether the principle of separation is sound, but rather by what means it can be applied; and to this problem we can now turn our attention.

IV

What devices can the playwright use to keep truth and at the same time create delight? I have said already that this is invention's work in every age. But a look backward may help invention. I stress here that I do not offer, at this point, as one of the sources of delight an alteration of the theme—an insertion of optimism—an analeptic truth or lie; I ask how even the bitterest truth can be made the object of an entertainment. And, as a matter of fact, the means are plentiful.

1. In the first place, spectacle: costume, music, dancing, extraordinary sets, imaginative lighting. All these are obvious means of transcending the street-truth; and, of course, much has been done in this respect on the European stage and in our own experimental theatre (chiefly in the universities). Even on Broadway we see an occasional, usually rather timid, *playing* with these artifices. But I have yet to see in this country even a remote competition for Peter Brook's production of *Titus Andronicus* in London a few years ago.

We cannot hope, perhaps, to recapture the integrated Greek experience of drama, discourse, song, music, dance, and costume, but we need writers who will occasionally call on these, not as accessories (a band of three tootling under the footlights between acts), but as a portion of the wonderful event itself. In one of Anouilh's comedies, a flute player, simulating sounds, weaves in and out among the characters without being seen by them. And why not? Why not in tragedy as well? Let tragedy dance.

But there is no need to expatiate on this subject. The modern theatre has won this battle, and the realistic stage is probably on its way out; at most the broom needs to be moved more energetically. Unfortunately, experimentation with the

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stage *qua* stage is not enough. An O'Neill or William Inge horror boldly staged is still a horror. In fact, as Elizabeth Drew has pointed out in her *Discovering Drama*, there is a grave danger of the director's superseding the playwright and of the drama's being "extinguished by its medium, the theatre." The director's boldness can degenerate into arrogance, and he may think that a purple beam of electric light on an actor's noodle is more important than the sense of what he calls the script. Imaginative staging, then, is only a first means. We must advance into the text of the play itself.

2. When a truth is too ugly or bitter in its nakedness, the dramatist can employ lively symbols—objects, characters, events. Amazingly desperate things can be said without disgusting an audience if they are said by means of allegory, as Beckett does in *Waiting for Godot* or Ghelderode in *Les Aveugles*. Allegory liberates the writer from literalism. He can mingle past with present, roll out *non sequiturs*, call in ghosts, make God dance a jig, and, in short, beget fauns and centaurs to his heart's content without for one moment letting go the truth.

3. The use of machinery, symbols, fantasy is closely associated, though not necessarily connected, with the use of humor for tragic or paratragic purposes. I have already mentioned the fact that comedy and tragedy are no longer clearly separated categories of art. The unifying of human experience along a single continuum, though Shakespeare anticipated it, may be considered the most important development of the theatre in this century. Yorick has in a sense displaced Hamlet; Yorick is the capital means of conveying horror without inspiring it, since he conveys it humorously. Is there a play more disenchanted than Schnitzler's masterful *Reigen*, or one more nihilistic than Anouilh's *Ornifle*? Still we are amused, or—if the word is too trivial after all—we have experienced a deep aesthetic satisfaction. Grim comedy, often of a symbolic nature, is the master form of the 20th-century theatre.

4. And the words: words are to be, not reporters, but alchemists. It was a grace in Synge to possess "an uncannily acute ear for dialogue," because the dialogue of the Aran

islanders was worth listening to. For the rest, my recommendation to American playwrights is that they plug their ears. Let them have their characters talk in ciphers rather than in the dismal English of the middle-class white American world. Drama ought to be poetry. This does not mean that the lines must rhyme or scan or end before reaching the margin of the page. I mean simply that drama should possess a great language, a verbal music, an authority with words: style, in short. If the world is lost, let it be lost in poetry: that way lies a consolation. Writing labs and writers' conferences notwithstanding, the dramatist should not resort to his own street-experience, and especially not to his street-experience of language. Hemingway and Faulkner both invented an idiom; why should the playwright merely listen?

5. Our offended playwright may well ask at this point whether he is to make his Bronx butcher talk like a character in *Salome*. And this brings us to the next and an important matter, namely the uses of the past and the exotic. My reply to the playwright is simply that he ought to populate his works with fewer Bronx butchers. I deny his axiom, that current ideas have to be exhibited in up-to-date situations. What strikes us in the Greek, Elizabethan, and French drama is that, exceptions aside, they used up-to-date materials for comedy, and the past and the exotic for tragedy. Perhaps in those days, too, it was hard to make a local butcher speak poetry. But the real reason for the practice was, I am convinced, an unuttered, probably an unconscious one. *The troubles of the here and now are painful*. An exhibition of mangled bodies of our own soldiers in our own recent war cannot but be repulsive, however "powerful" the effect may be; and if it is repulsive, then it is not art. If the artist wishes to express his views about war, he is well advised to go back, like Euripides or Giraudoux, to Troy. Doing so, he can hold on to his insight, his truth, and, at the same time, exhilarate. The explanation is, of course, the old one, that between the work of art and the audience there must be a distance. Not Euterpe herself can sing me an entertaining song about the rape and murder of my mother, or about the fool I made of myself

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before a woman. A joke about divorce does not amuse a divorcee; a tragedy about the death of a young wife does not give the widower aesthetic satisfaction. For then the artifact turns fact, and delight dies; the spectator is shocked. But, cries the serious artist, it is my aim to shock! The aim is false. Art is a game, though sometimes a sublime one. We know how games of a more trivial sort can become unpleasant when something real suddenly intrudes—an envy, a hatred, a provocation. Art, too, can become disagreeable by coming too close. It may not be a lovable fact about man, but fact it is that an atrocity committed by Tamerlane, or committed to-day at the other end of the world, is far less shocking than the very same atrocity committed here and now. This fact, at any rate, provides the writer with his best chance of being serious without being repulsive.

As we have seen, there are other devices besides using the past or the far-away to transubstantiate the disagreeable; but this is one of the best, for it opens the way to all the others: to poetry, to music, to spectacle, and to the expressionistic stage. It is no accident that Mr. Miller's one good play, *The Crucible*, has gone for its material to where the American playwright will naturally tend to go: his own country's past. And yet no one has missed the modern idea of his play, or, for that matter, of Jeffers' *Medea* or Sartre's *Les Mouches*.

When, however, the playwright relies on the past as such, without drawing importantly on other artifices, he must bring out rather than conceal the pastness of the past. If he tries to impress on his audience the contemporaneousness of the events on stage, if he seems to be saying that his use of the past is the most superficial of accidents, he will probably obtain his wish, and have produced, despite the setting, another offspring in the naturalistic faith. In a word, distance is not an automatic consequence of pastness; in the arts, at any rate, it must be worked for.

The means I have discussed so far under the rubric of artifice all perform the same triune function. First, they are delightful in themselves and therefore exist in part for their own sakes. Second, they create distance or detachment, and

thus mitigate the shock of reality. But third, and most important, they shed an especial light over the reality which is being inspected. Murder committed in alexandrines (declaimed, of course) is still murder, but the triple effect of the artifice is to invest our fright with the strange quality we call aesthetic; the quality, in short, which provokes pleasure; the quality which distinguishes art from newsreel. "It is a supreme sensual pleasure," Flaubert writes in one of his letters, "to learn, to absorb Truth by way of Beauty." Flaubert, in other words, was not a naturalist, but an artist.

I do not mean that the utterly repulsive has no place at all on the serious stage. The devices by means of which painful situations are kept as situations but not as pain do not have to be used on every occasion. The audience is willing to suffer actual discomfort while it watches a performance provided that compensations are furnished for the moments of pain. There is a kind of chiaroscuro in drama which allows for doses of loathsomeness. The Greeks are said to have panicked at the sight of Aeschylus' Furies; but Apollo was not far away to placate the audience. In addition, therefore, to the devices I have listed so far, we may resort to the method of compensation, whereby the painful is not transformed, but surrounded. Surrounded by what? By something hopeful and inspiring, as Ruskin demanded? Possibly, but not necessarily; surrounded, at any rate, by whatever gives pleasure: poetry, spectacle, mystery, the exotic—artifice, in short.

V

I have already spoken of the role of intellect in drama, but we should return to the subject now, though without hoping in so short a space to do justice to the complications of this problem. Intelligence in a play—the importance, the greatness of whatever is being depicted as true—is one of the chief sources of pleasure in art, for each man loves to behold the finest and deepest truths which he, at his own level, is capable of comprehending. Were the stimulation of our minds not

agreeable, rather than morally imperative, it would simply have no place in art.

Let us do no more than formulate certain principles with regard to intelligence in drama. In the first place, stupidity (in our judgment, of course) dissolves merit, and no degree of ingenuity in the artifice or cunning in the staging can rescue a stupid play from its inconsequence. Secondly, since intelligence is a powerful pleasure-giver, we must infer that all other things being equal, the more intelligent play is also the better one. That is why, too, the supremely fine play, inasmuch as it would have to unite all pleasure-giving devices each in supreme form, would have to be supremely intelligent. Sophocles is Sophocles and Shakespeare is Shakespeare not only because of their gift for language, but because they appeal to what is most complex in our mental life, what is felt, also, to be most universally and importantly true. In the third place, out of the large area of tolerable, worthy, respectable ideas which exist between the supremely true and the stupid, enough can be plucked to make possible good and even excellent drama. This is what led me to state, on an earlier page, that what is wrong with our dramatists is not mental vacuity but the unwillingness to see serious art as pleasure. Their ideas as such, or the situations they choose to depict, are not important enough for the greatest art—there is too much concern, for one thing, with the tangential problems of sick minds—but they are adequate for art of a very high order. In the fourth place, a further concession can be made, namely that, since we are impressed and delighted by a display of intelligence in a work of art, a naturalistic play which so impresses us is by no means a complete loss. Though its endeavor to shock us as art as much as we ought to be shocked by the living event is an aberration, still its use of this particular source of delight—the intelligence, the true-ness, the importance of what it sees—can give it a certain merit. This much, for example, can be said of *Hedda Gabler* and *The Wild Duck*, and of the best American naturalistic plays. But higher than such plays we can hardly go—*Hedda*

Gabler cannot ultimately compete with Racine's *Phèdre*, though it is at least as intelligent a play, for the simple reason that the artifice which carries it is not delightful: Ibsen has not *danced* his truth.

In speaking of intelligence in theme or subject matter as a source of pleasure, I have not deviated from the subject I proposed, namely, how to keep the evil or the sordid as theme without producing aberrant art. It is plain that great theatre need not be even remotely optimistic with regard to its view of reality; what optimism it needs is with regard to its own possibility as joygiver. But now we can go a step further, and ask whether "bleakest perception" is all that is permitted to the serious artist. Is it not rather a calamity of our time that the subject of joy should be left largely to the venal and trivial writers, and that the newcomer who wishes to distinguish himself from "the commercial theatre" is almost forced to turn to the diseases of reality? We need a Tolstoy among us.

Crow is realist. But then
Oriole, also, may be realist.

Decency and sanity, in their most common and bourgeois acceptations, might yet become the subjects of real praise, and something might be made of the fact that toast is not always burned in this world.

We have now turned away from the use of artifice to speak of the themes themselves, whether they are treated realistically or not. And thus still another step suggests itself. The dramatist's theme can be reality as a good or reality as an evil; but could it not venture beyond reality—beyond, that is, whatever the writer himself conceives to be reality? For the great issues of life concern not only life-as-it-is, but also life-as-it-might-be. True art, it appears, does not have to confine itself to the real. It can also prophesy.

I do not mean that this kind of art presents a land of Cockaigne, where no one worries and everybody eats or loves all day long. This would be fantasy; and while fantasy (say, an idyll) is far from being an impermissible form of art, it can hardly satisfy all our serious concerns. But true art can idealize

without losing contact, and do so in the midst of real and plentifully grim situations: Desdemona is an ideal, the love of Romeo and Juliet is an ideal, and—closer to us—the intelligence of Shaw's characters is an ideal (even his boobies are bright). The greatness of Chekhov, for example, lies not only in the tenderness which he obviously feels for many of his characters, but the love for them which he arouses in us; or I shall put it more accurately: the esteem. An abyss separates his *Three Sisters*, for all the naturalism of its dialogue, from *A Streetcar Named Desire* or *Death of a Salesman*. The Americans arouse, at best, our pity for their hapless Blanche Dubois and Willy Loman; but we do not esteem these characters (and esteem is a modest word; what of admiration? what of veneration?), and therefore we do not really love them. Another beauty is denied us.

I have said that this esteem and love are aroused by idealization, but perhaps in fact Desdemona and Juliet and Chekhov's people are pictures of reality as accurate as those of the mean, the ugly, the inchoate. If this is so, then we are back with the earlier principle that the theatre can give joy by attending to the best of this world as well as to the worst. But let us pass beyond the illustrations, not arguing whether Desdemona is a fact or a hope in this world, and stick to the principle itself. On occasion at least, art can and ought to magnify and beautify what is offered by reality. The suggestion is far from being an original one; on the contrary, I propose a return to aesthetic principles which governed European—and Oriental—art from their beginnings up to the age of realism. Art not only exposes; it also proposes.

Intelligent dialogue is a plausible type of idealization. The brilliance of Oscar Wilde's dialogue, or that of his Restoration ancestors, is an unearthly one. It expresses a desirable quasi-possibility of man similar, in its own way, to the beauty of character expressed through Desdemona, or (to anticipate) the heroism expressed through Achilles. The most recent master of this kind of idealization is Shaw, but there are many others in Europe who are willing and able to offer to modern *cognoscenti* what Euripides and Shakespeare gave theirs.

Whether the speech of Odysseus concerning hierarchy in *Troilus and Cressida*, or Hamlet's advice to the players, has or has not any relevance to the issue of the respective plays hardly seems to matter, so keen is our pleasure in either. The typical sort of dialogue in our own drama—I gave some examples on an earlier page—is unfortunately more like the following from *Camino Real*:

KILROY. Y'know what it is you miss most? When you're separated. From someone. You lived. With. And loved? It's waking up in the night! With that—warmness beside you!

MARGUERITE. Yes, that *warmness* beside you!

KILROY. Once you get used to that. *Warmness!* It's a hell of a lonely feeling to wake up without it! Specially in some dollar-a-night hotel room on Skid! A hot-water bottle won't do. And a stranger. Won't do. It has to be some one you're used to. And that you. KNOW LOVES you.

This fragment is neither superior nor inferior to the usual in our best playwrights; and it can hardly be denied that conversation at this level neglects areas of delight eagerly exploited by Shaw, by Schnitzler, by Giraudoux, by Fry.

Finally, from idealization of virtue and idealization of intelligence we turn to idealization of courage, or the making of fictive heroes. True, we can question again whether a writer who presents a greater-than-normal hero means to offer us a piece of reality or a hope for the world. But it is suggestive that at all times the stories of heroes have been stories of the past: Achilles lay in Homer's past, Oedipus in Sophocles', Aeneas in Virgil's, Arthur in Chrétien de Troyes', and Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's. There are exceptions, of course, but the evidence tells us that it was always difficult to believe in real—that is to say, present—magnitude; and that the pictures of heroes were so many prayers for what might be. The modern temper, in any event, is not favorable to idealization. Competent playwrights of this century have preferred to solve the problem of creating delight by expressionistic and symbolic renderings of evil, rather than by the hope of what man might be—in other words, by sublimating modes of utterance rather than themes. Nevertheless, the boule-

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ward of heroes remains open, and a little traffic is still seen on it.

The drama which exploits themes of decency and sanity and does so intelligently, and the drama which prophesies by magnifying and beautifying the ordinary what-is, would give us the final delight, transcending the pleasure we obtain from the artistic manipulations I have treated in these pages. If I have concerned myself principally with what can be made of drama which espouses the ultimate in existential nausea, that is, obviously, because the times require one to aspire modestly. For the moment, the regeneration—or rather the generation—of the American theatre awaits the action of new artists, drunk not with truth but with play, who will invent images and sounds impudently unlike the sights and noises we return to, alas, when the curtain comes down.

HARDY, FAULKNER, AND THE PROSAICS OF TRAGEDY

John Paterson

I

IN THE TWO CENTURIES OR MORE of its history, the novel has not often accommodated the sublime affections and affirmations of tragedy. Committed to the closest possible registration of the here and the now, the near and the familiar, it has opposed itself from the very beginning to the tragedian's passion for the far and the forever, to his aristocratic celebration of the grand and the heroic in human experience. Committed to the exploration of "character" as its surest link with a particular actuality, the novel has accordingly repudiated the Aristotelian first principle of the "plot" with its evocation of the ideal or the universal in experience. Hoping to revive a tragic theater in our time, Yeats insists that "character can only express itself perfectly in a real world, being that world's creature." In "the great periods of drama," he writes, "character grows less and sometimes disappears." But Henry James, surely the shrewdest and most sympathetic friend the novel ever had, recognizes "character" as the indispensable first principle of his form and "plot" ("nefarious name") as its misfortune. "There is no such thing in the world as an adventure pure and simple," he says; "there is only mine and yours, and his and hers."

Compelled by its skepticism of ultimate values, by its fidelity to the here and now, the novel has been anxious to represent human life and character in terms of those spatial and temporal conditions that traditional tragedy, only at home in all time and all space, had chosen to ignore. In restricting the action to twenty-four hours, the classical dramatist in effect refused, one commentator has recently written,

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to acknowledge the importance of time in human affairs,¹ just as he refused, by his indifference to anything but the most nominal setting, to acknowledge the importance of environment in human affairs. One of the novelist's most urgent obligations, on the other hand, was, said James, to represent "the lapse of time, the duration of the subject" as well as "the natural and social air" surrounding his characters. "In the void they are not interesting," he said. "Their situation takes hold of us, because it is theirs, not because it is somebody's, any one's, that of creatures unidentified." In its affinity for the essential and the exceptional in human experience, then, tragedy has traditionally been wedded to the heightened and many-splendored language of poetry, but the novel, satisfied to record the more unspectacular data of the daily domestic reality, has turned to the modest referential language of prose.

For all its churlish recalcitrance to tragic consummations, however, the novel is not finally and forever incapable of that supreme effort of the literary imagination. It is a question, for one thing, whether the novelist's infatuation with the mysteries and profundities of character must necessarily be at the total expense of the plot. Character in Aeschylus may be subordinated to Aristotle's first principle, but there is the evidence of Sophocles, not to mention Shakespeare, that a strong impression of character is perfectly compatible with a strong impression of plot. What Lear becomes is after all as important to the tragic impact of Shakespeare's play as what becomes of him. Indeed, to the extent that character itself is fate, is organic with and contributory to the general power that encompasses its downfall, the novelist's preoccupation with character need not be preemptive. Even when he is prompted, by his love of a more intimate reality, to particularize character beyond anything in Sophocles and Shakespeare, it is still not certain how far he may go beyond Sophocles and Shakespeare, how far indulge his strong sense for

¹ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 23. These paragraphs are heavily indebted to Mr. Watt's study of the novel and the fundamentals of its form.

character, before the authority of the plot is irreparably compromised. The novel is the free and flexible form *par excellence*. If *all* is not possible to its freedom and flexibility, a freedom and flexibility limited by its obligation to be lifelike, then *much* is possible and, theoretically at least, there is no reason why that "much" may not include such a relationship between plot and character as will dishonor neither its commitment as tragedy nor its commitment as novel.

The novel's obligation to represent conditions both spatial and temporal is perhaps less easily circumvented. The theatrical and novelistic modes are one at least in their exploitation of character and plot, but the representation of human life in terms of its spatial and temporal conditions, in terms of James's "distillation of the natural and social air," is surely as foreign to the one as it is native to the other. If the novelist can scarcely represent a character without also representing his conditions, it is still his option—such is the elasticity of his medium—whether that emphasis will fall on the character or on the conditions. The novel of Zola and Dreiser with its assumption that the natural and social air surrounding character was something more solid than a Jamesian distillation is obviously well within the tradition of the form, but just as obviously it does not exhaust the possibilities of the form. The spatial conditions "maximized" by the naturalist in the interests of a doctrine are as easily and as legitimately minimized in the interests of a tragic vision. The risks, the dangers of offending against verisimilitude, are in either case the same: the schematizations of the tragic artist are no more arbitrary, no more artificial, than the schematizations of the naturalistic artist. The novelist is, of course, preoccupied with man's life in time to an extent that the classical tragedian could not well afford to be; but this necessary preoccupation of the novelist is not finally disabling. The restriction of the action to twenty-four hours may reveal the indifference of classical tragedy to the importance of time in human affairs; but the expendability of this convention in Shakespeare would suggest that a rigorous anti-realism with respect to the passage of time is no more absolute a requirement than a

rigorous anti-realism with respect to character and to the spatial conditions out of which it comes.

Of all the exigencies with which the novelist as tragedian is confronted, his commitment to the language of prose should prove the least insupportable. If the impact of Greek tragedy is not seriously lessened by the loss in translation of the richness of its original language, it is surely for the good Aristotelian reason that the tragic apotheosis is less a function of the rhetoric than a function of character and plot. Indeed, language cannot serve the same function in the novel that it does in the theater. Since the reading of a novel is necessarily a more diffused experience than the witnessing of a play, the rhetorical intensity *de rigueur* over the shorter duration of a dramatic performance is obviously *de trop* over the longer duration of novelistic "performance." Like other anti-realistic properties of traditional tragedy, moreover, the language of poetry is a convention, a means to an end. The protagonist is not a great man because he speaks lyric poetry; he speaks lyric poetry because he is a great man. For the demonstration of his hero's greatness, however, the novelist has at his disposal resources other than those made available by the language of poetry. Employing with the dramatist the familiar counters of character and incident, he is free, as the dramatist is not, to exhibit character from a multitude of perspectives and in an infinite variety of moments. For the tragedian as novelist much more than for the tragedian as dramatist, in short, the harmony and intensity and all that makes for the tragic effect must be more in his imagined material than in his linguistic or stylistic treatment of it.

The novel is, of course, committed, both by its engagement to hold the mirror hard against the surface of life and by the unheroic climate of the "life" that nourished it, to eschew the sublime and embrace the ordinary. As Tolstoi and Dostoevski have demonstrated, however, it is still the artist's option and opportunity, in the novel as well as out of it, to make the ordinary extraordinary, to rediscover the heroic latent in the unheroic. The novel's formal realism performs, as Ian Watt has pointed out, less as an end in itself than as a means: it

describes a mode of perception, not a literary or artistic structure. The historical dilemma of the form has been, in fact—and this observation is once again Mr. Watt's—to import just such a structure without offending against its nearness and resemblance to life.² At the close range at which it holds the mirror to life, the striking schematizations of plot, whether tragic or comic, do not presumably appear. The question becomes, then, whether a tragic structure involves a heavier importation of the artificial and the arbitrary than the novel can properly be expected to bear. Hence the particular significance of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. It suggests that a novel may reach to tragedy without ceasing to be a novel, that it may even approximate the artificial and arbitrary conventions of Aristotelian tragedy without finally sacrificing that rich and dense impression of life demanded of it as a novel.

II

The Mayor of Casterbridge reinstates, to begin with, the Aristotelian relation between plot and character which the novel has tended to reverse. Traditional rather than improvised, fabulous in the sense that the plots of *Oedipus* and *Lear* are fabulous, Hardy's plot reaches to and exploits the primitive rhythms of a fundamental process, the immemorial contest between the old god, the old dispensation, and the new. It possesses to this extent a life, an expressive value, entirely its own. It does not merely exist, as in Dickens, to set character in motion nor, as in George Eliot, to externalize the will of character acting with or against the bias of environment. It enacts a universal motion or movement greater than and exterior to both the will of character and the bias of environment. Surrounded as he is by a pallid aggregation of characters, the masterful figure of Michael Henchard does dominate—as indeed he should—the world of the novel. But he dominates it to the same extent—no less and no more—that *Lear* and *Oedipus* dominate their worlds. Like them, he

² Watt, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

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may contribute as character to the action; but he is not, as character, its ultimate source.

If the fascinations of individual character are not indulged at the expense of the plot, it is because the protagonist is not subjected to the remorseless psychological analysis peculiar to novelistic form. Rich, powerful, and various as it is, Henchard's inner life is rendered almost entirely in terms of action and dialogue and, failing that, in terms of a descriptive technique less reportorial than dramatic. His reaction to his wife's sudden reappearance after twenty years is registered, for example, in a simple and unelaborated detail that renders superfluous the minute analysis and exposition to which the novel's interest in character generally leads it: "he sat in his dining-room stiffly erect, gazing at the opposite wall as if he read his history there." As a result, the personality of the protagonist remains to the very end, as it does in the *Agamemnon* and *Oedipus Rex*, something of a miracle and a mystery. More important, the novel is spared, by its freedom from the psychological norm, that disproportionate emphasis on character that might have complicated at least its status as tragedy.

The Mayor of Casterbridge also restores the traditional relationship between scene or setting on the one hand and plot and character on the other. It expressly contravenes the novel's strong predisposition to exhibit character in terms of its "conditions." For Casterbridge does not surround and ultimately overwhelm the principals of the novel, has little of the density and depth of an Egdon Heath or a Middlemarch. Asserting itself scarcely more aggressively than the abstract settings of the Periclean and Elizabethan stages, the city remains discreetly in the background of the novel. Clym Yeobright seems so small because Egdon Heath looms so large behind him; Michael Henchard looms so large because Casterbridge seems so small. The technique responsible for the making of the protagonist is also responsible, in fact, for the making of the scene. Just as Henchard is not, like Dorothea Brooke or Eustacia Vye, required to sit for his portrait, Casterbridge is not, like Middlemarch or Egdon Heath, sub-

jected to an elaborate and exhaustive set description. Entering the novel in pieces and fragments, it merges into and, like Henchard himself, is easily absorbed by, the principal effect of the plot. The emphasis on the natural or social surroundings that might have made for a gigantism of setting is equally repudiated with the psychological emphasis that might have made for a gigantism of character.

This is not to say that realistic elements do not enter the novel at all. While it does reenact a primitive universal process, it plainly exploits, in registering the impact of the new national culture on the ancient provincial culture of Wessex, the data of its particular time and place. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is not compromised as tragedy, however, as *Tess* and *Jude* were to be compromised, and as it is in general the doom of the novel to be compromised, by a preoccupation with purely contemporary issues and conditions: e.g., the predicament of the unwed mother in modern society and the validity (or invalidity) of the laws governing marriage. The conflict between the obsolescent agriculture that dates back to the Heptarchy and the new mechanized agriculture that comes in with the 19th century is not developed for its own sake but only insofar as it defines the tragic conflict between Henchard and Farfrae, the old dispensation and the new. The unspectacular materials of contemporary reality are assimilated by the tragic structure of the novel.

The Mayor of Casterbridge thus modifies, on behalf of its tragic motive, the novel's characteristic amplitude and elasticity of form, its democratic willingness to admit, as tragedy cannot safely do, the unblest life of time and history. This is so much the case that Casterbridge's historical associations are more Roman and Hebraic than English. Michael Henchard is not after all the mayor of Dorchester, the provincial town whose reality is continuous with London and Liverpool and Manchester, but the mayor of Casterbridge, the provincial capital whose reality is continuous with Thebes, Padan-Aram, and ancient Rome. If his status and stature as tragic hero are not compromised by his membership in the antiheroic middleclass, if he is more the tribal chieftain than

the modern mayor, it is because Casterbridge suggests, with its agrarian economy, with its merchant aristocracy and its rude population of mechanics, artisans, and laborers, a primitive hierarchic society Biblical or Roman in its simplicity. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* illustrates that the novel can fulfill its primary obligation to be lifelike, to represent the specific conditions of a time and place, and at the same time so far transcend them, so far reduce them to means, as to satisfy the more artistic, more artificial, requirements of tragedy.

The preeminence of plot and character as the chief agents of the tragic effect is guaranteed, finally, both by Hardy's adaptation of the omniscient convention and by the unspectacular simplicity of his prose. Using the referential language traditional with prose fiction, Aristotelian Hardy subordinates the arts of language to the primary impression of plot and character. Of all his novels, furthermore, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* suffers least from the interventions of a didactic and moralizing author. Though the voice of the novel is the voice of the author, it comes not from the foreground but, faintly and only intermittently, from the background. Taking much of the force out of Aristotle's dictum that tragedy must assume the form of action rather than of narrative, Hardy's epic author does not destroy that intense illusion of reality which the tragic novelist must maintain if he is to compete on equal terms with the dramatist. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* suggests, in short, that the novel may adapt itself to even the most stringent necessities of tragic form without doing violence to the necessities of its own.³

III

The effect of the revolution that has visited the theory and practice of prose fiction since Hardy's day has been to make the novel more "novelistic" than ever before, and accordingly to disable it still further as the instrument of a tragic vision.

³ In "*The Mayor of Casterbridge as Tragedy*," *Victorian Studies* (December, 1959), I tried to show that the tragic values and assumptions animating the novel were as traditional, as archaic, as its form and technique.

The increasing refinements in the management of point of view and the development of resources for registering the stream of consciousness have been responsible for a more rigorous exploration of character than was ever contemplated by even the most "character"-oriented of the antediluvians. With the disappearance of plot in the skies or deeps of the human consciousness, with its reincarnation as a blurred vibration in the little universe of temperament, the Lambert Strethers and Stephen Dedaluses have been able to dominate their fictive worlds as the David Copperfields and Dorothea Brookes could not dominate theirs. One of the first and frankest recognitions of the modern novelist has been, in fact, the bankruptcy of plot as a meaningful artistic control. Perhaps instructed by its impoverishment in the fiction of his predecessors, he has been at pains, as E. M. Forster has remarked, to do away with it altogether: "as for a plot—to pot with the plot, break it up, boil it down."

The disappearance of plot in the traditional sense would not by itself discourage the novel's claims to tragic status. Tolstoi's *The Death of Ivan Ilych* triumphantly demonstrates that fiction with an orientation to character is not necessarily confounded as tragic art, that a tragic action may be embodied in a sequence other than a sequence of events without being, for all that, less than authentically tragic. More fatal for these claims in the long run, however, has been the invasion of the fiction of the last hundred years by the cult of the symbolist. Confronted by the novelist's historic problem of harmonizing his commitment to verisimilitude with his passion for the truth and beauty of artistic structure, seeking in effect to evoke as theme- or symbol-maker the universal he can no longer evoke as plot-maker, the modern practitioner of the form has rendered character and incident not as values in themselves, but as counters in a thematic or symbolic unity. The result has been to further emasculate the novel as the substance of the tragic perception.

The thematic or symbolic structure undermines, for one thing, the large or heroic vision of life which is the *sine qua non* of tragedy. Since all values are arbitrarily assigned, since

nothing has a value in itself, the antiheroic becomes in a symbolic frame as meaningful as the heroic: to eat a peach becomes as "valuable" as to kill one's father or to sell one's wife. Like the dramatic point of view and the stream of consciousness method, furthermore, the thematic or symbolic structure modifies the objective reality of character and action, forces upon them values and meanings not intrinsically their own, and weakens them to this extent as agents of tragedy. His metaphysical reality taking precedence over his physical reality, the symbolic personage cannot properly or convincingly serve the purposes of the action, no matter how liberally "action" is defined. He "may produce effects but," as Dr. Johnson long ago observed, "he cannot conduct actions; when the phantom is put in motion, [he] dissolves." He is more appropriate for this reason to the weird atmosphere of romance than to the sublime atmosphere of tragedy.⁴

As prejudicial to the cause of tragedy as the cult of the symbol has been the cult of style in modern fiction. The peculiarity of every major innovation in the art of fiction over the last hundred years—of the Jamesian point of view and the Joycean stream of consciousness as well as of the symbolist method—is that it has called for a general heightening and intensification of the prose idiom. Language has been required to approximate the condition of lyric poetry, to carry a weight that the antediluvian novel, with its more objective orientation, did not find necessary. As a result of this development, prose fiction has acquired in our time a new aesthetic respectability and prestige. But if Aristotle was right in claiming that the tragic effect was less a function of language and style than a function of character and plot, and there is little in the literature of tragedy to prove him wrong, then the modern novel's rhetorical complexity and richness would

⁴ Such symbolic romances as *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby Dick* have recently been represented as "the first novels in English to express the old (*i.e.*, the tragic) vision by means of the new vehicle" (Richard Sewall, *The Vision of Tragedy* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959], p. 85). So to represent them, however, is to disregard their inadequacy as fictions. Their symbolic or allegorical reality prevailing over their intrinsic, their objective, reality, they cannot evoke the full imaginative and emotional response essential to the experience of tragedy.

seem, from the point of view of tragedy, more a bane than a blessing.⁵ Joining with the dramatic point of view, the stream of consciousness method, and the art of the symbolist to attenuate or obscure the primary images of character and action, the rhetorical emphasis prevents the novel from exploiting the very sources that have made in the past for the great vitality of tragedy. Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* is a case in point. Eventually more formidable as a work of art and certainly more complete as a novel than Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Absalom, Absalom!* seems, when the two are put together, conspicuously inferior as tragedy.

IV

Defined more than once as an authentic and fully developed tragedy,⁶ Faulkner's novel shows remarkably fundamental identities with Hardy's tragic masterpiece. As a fable of the glory and grotesqueness of man's destiny on earth, Thomas Sutpen's rise and fall is not, after all, very different from Michael Henchard's. If Hardy's hero has been driven by his hunger for worldly power and his impatience with domestic restraints to sell his wife to a sailor for five guineas, Faulkner's has been driven, by the same hunger and impatience, to commit the same crime: to repudiate the Haitian wife whose Negro blood stood in the way of his ambition. If Henchard's Faustian violation of his solidarity with man and nature has given him the illegitimate power and freedom to become the chief political and financial force in the community, Sutpen's has given him the same freedom and power and enabled him to realize the same basic design: to build a plantation, marry a respectable woman, and reign

⁵ Whatever sense of tragedy *Moby Dick* can be said to generate derives less from the vividness of character and action than from the richness of the rhetoric. Its power as tragedy is, for this reason, a muted power at best.

⁶ See Cleanth Brooks, "*Absalom, Absalom!* The Definition of Innocence," *Sewanee Review*, LIX (Autumn, 1951), 543-558; Walter L. Sullivan, "The Tragic Design of *Absalom, Absalom!*," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, L (October, 1951), 552-566; Ilse Duso Lind, "The Design and Meaning of *Absalom, Absalom!*," *PMLA*, LXX (December, 1955), 887-912. See also Richard Sewall's discussion of *Absalom, Absalom!* in *The Vision of Tragedy*.

in baronial splendour over a large domain. The overweening pride, the psychological necessity, responsible for the original crime condemns Sutpen, like Henchard, finally, to commit the same crime over and over again and, again like Henchard, to create the conditions of his own disaster.

There are, of course, significant differences in emphasis. Though both Hardy and Faulkner can evoke the reality of a moral force in the universe against which man can offend and by which he can be punished, Faulkner's assumptions are naturalistic to a degree that Hardy's are not. For Sutpen's arrogant and cruel aspiration a causal explanation is, after all, produced in his humiliation as a boy at the front door of a plantation owner: the "conditions" responsible for his character, his monomania, are eventually accounted for. But no such causal explanation, no such account, is offered for the moral defection of Michael Henchard. Given no boyhood, no past that antedates his startling crime in the first chapters of the novel, Henchard comes, as it were, out of nowhere, the mysterious flaw in his character emerging from and explained by no ascertainable "conditions." Moreover, since the motive and the fate of Sutpen's private design is partially bound up with the motive and the fate of the larger design of the South, he becomes in part the victim of historical necessity. The necessity that encompasses the fall of Michael Henchard, on the other hand, emanates from a source outside rather than inside history. His defeat may be associated with, but is not caused by, the disappearance of the old agriculture and the accession of the new.

Hardy's novel closes, accordingly, on a note of grace altogether missing in Faulkner's. In the absence of a mechanistic necessity, historical or otherwise, Henchard's disastrous end is prompted as much by his own sense of guilt as by his pride. It is the condition of Sutpen's downfall, on the other hand, that he can feel no sense of his own moral dereliction, that he is capable neither of guilt nor of growth. Henchard can thus be justified at last by his perception of the enormity of his crime and the appropriateness of his punishment. But Sutpen is arrogant and blind to the very end. Hen-

chard's death can suggest an act of piety, an earnest of salvation, not very different from Lear's or Antony's; but Sutpen's is inevitably a slaughter, an earnest of damnation. Henchard does not die to leave the world in darkness and ashes: supplanted in the persons of Farfrae and Elizabeth by simple imaginations untroubled by impious and grandiose ambitions, the old violent sin-stained dispensation for which he stands gives way to a milder and more humane order of things. With the grisly death of Thomas Sutpen, however, the light goes out as if forever. Succeeded not by the Farfraes and Elizabeths, those pledges of a peaceful and pious future, but by a totally demoralized Quentin Compson, Sutpen passes on not a new and better world born out of the violence and ashes of the old, but a ruined universe incapable of regeneration.

If *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is more successful as tragedy than *Absalom, Absalom!*, however, it is not primarily for the reason that Hardy's assumptions are less mechanistic than Faulkner's. It is primarily for the reason that Hardy, the provincial and the primitivist as novelist, was profoundly indifferent to that revolution in form of which Faulkner was to be the heir and beneficiary. It is for the reason, in short, that Hardy's traditional and even rudimentary equipment as a worker in the novel is ultimately more consistent with the purposes of tragedy than Faulkner's elaborate poetics. Thus while the omniscient point of view in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* has the effect of insuring the continuity of the action, it is one of the necessary concomitants of the serial point of view employed by Faulkner that it makes for a fragmentation of the action. Registering itself as the possession of a removed and Olympian consciousness, the story of Michael Henchard advances in chronological time and hence can evoke a powerful sense of the inevitability of the hero's doom. Registered in the minds of four impassioned and even distracted narrators (Rosa Coldfield, Mr. Compson, Shreve McCannon, and Quentin Compson), the story of Thomas Sutpen exists only in psychological time and must sacrifice to this extent that sense of an inexorable march of

events upon which the impact of tragedy at least partially depends.

Faulkner's serial point of view does have the effect of establishing distance between the reader and the principals of the action, an effect presumably justified by the authority of Greek tragedy. Placed as they are in the myth-making imaginations of Rosa Coldfield and Mr. Compson, the novel's chief agents are generalized as characters; freed from the restraints of a realistic psychology, they come to suggest the abstract creatures of classical tragedy. Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon can thus be described as existing "only to perform the parts assigned to them" and Clytie as serving "primarily to illuminate—not her own psychology—but the psychological, social, and moral aspects of the Negro-white conflict."⁷ The problem of distance, however, is a problem more peculiar to the drama than to the novel; since the novelistic experience is less immediate than the dramatic experience, the problem of the novelist as tragic artist is less to create distance between the reader and his images than to remove it. The generalized character makes, moreover, a poor and unconvincing showing in a form that thrives on particularity. It offends against the sense of lifelikeness which is among the novelist's chief resources at the same time that it weakens the reader's identification with the protagonist which is among the tragedian's chief resources. If the point of Faulkner's narrative device was to establish distance between the reader and the principals of the action, the distance turns out to have been too great.

It is the effect of Hardy's omniscient post of observation, above all, that it guarantees, in keeping with the Aristotelian dictum, the primary reality of character and plot. It is the effect of Faulkner's limited post (or posts) of observation, on the other hand, that it makes for a reduction of their reality. Told from the omniscient point of view, the action embodied in the story of Michael Henchard is located in the very foreground of the novel, its reality unconditioned and therefore undiminished by the intermediation of the interested

⁷ Lind, "The Design and Meaning of *Absalom, Absalom!*," pp. 888-9.

narrator or narrators. Told from the point of view of four participants or observers all placed at various removes from the central action but all taking up positions within the framework of that action, the story of Thomas Sutpen, the basis of the novel's claims to tragic status, must necessarily retreat into the background, its reality as an action giving way to and obscured by the reality of the narrators as characters. The post of observation placed within the narrative framework does make, as James never tired of insisting, for vividness and concreteness of drama. The vital question for tragedy, however, is whether it is the subject or the object that has the benefit of the vividness and concreteness, and in the case of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the vividness and concreteness are more for the subject, for Rosa Coldfield and Quentin Compson, than for the object, for Thomas Sutpen and his tragic history. What occupies the novel, after all, is not the external drama of the hero but the internal drama of the narrators, their misrepresentations and distortions of the external drama, their investigation and final discovery of its central meaning. "It is Quentin's tragedy, above all, which the Sutpen tragedy must finally illuminate," one critic has recently explained.⁸ But if it is Quentin's tragedy and not Sutpen's, then it is for obvious reasons no tragedy at all.

V

What makes all the difference, then, between *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, what makes the one a tragedy and the other, albeit a bird of wondrous plumage, still a bird of quite another feather, is that where the plot in Hardy's novel has a life and a value of its own not variable with every unit of human consciousness, where it has in this degree a continuity in ontological or universal time, that same plot in Faulkner's novel achieves a continuity only in psychological time, alters in meaning from witness to witness, and is only stabilized, finally, as to its reality, in

⁸ Lind, *op. cit.*, p. 893.

the problematical and hysterical consciousness of Quentin Compson. The plot, whose objectivity and whose independence of the vagaries of individual temperament were underwritten in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* by the illusion of an omniscient or absolute consciousness, declines in *Absalom, Absalom!* to a vibration in the agonized and finite consciousness of merely human observers, and is to this extent deprived of its power as the life and first principle of tragedy. The fate of character is to lose its reality in the same misty and mystic vibrations. For all the advantages in the way of vividness and concreteness that have been claimed for the dramatic point of view, Michael Henchard has a substantial reality which Sutpen, as the figment of a series of neurotic imaginations, cannot quite match. And having that reality, the illusion at least of objective reality, he can qualify as a tragic hero in a way that Sutpen cannot. Although it has currently been the fashion to denounce the omniscient convention as clumsy and old-fashioned, it is Hardy's stubborn orthodoxy in this connection that makes possible the specifically tragic consummation of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* at the same time that it is Faulkner's sophistication that militates against a specifically tragic consummation in *Absalom, Absalom!*

As damaging for the tragic purposes of Faulkner's novel is the rhetorical emphasis, the exploitation of purely stylistic resources, which is the usual concomitant of the dramatic point of view. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the tragic intensity is a function not of rhetoric and style, but of the imagined material itself. Its language suggests not a crazy mirror in which character and incident are returned mutilated and distorted, but a clear window through which they are defined in lights and lines of their own. It acts with the omniscient point of view to produce that illusion of objectivity essential to the novel's status as a tragic experience. Required, on the other hand, to dramatize the passionate implication of the narrators, Faulkner's prose is so charged with the figures and rhythms of the language of poetry that it threatens to overwhelm the primary images of character

and event. The tragic intensity that informs the novel becomes to a dangerous extent a product of the language rather than of the imagined material. The effects of character and plot are so far submerged in rhetorical effects, the vividness of the action is so far subordinated to the vividness of the emotions with which the narrators respond, that the novel's impact is eventually more melodramatic than dramatic, the restraint of tragic art giving way to the excess of Gothic romance.

Already blurred and diffused by the complicated effects of language and point of view, the primary images of character and event are further diffused and blurred in *Absalom, Absalom!* by being called upon to assume a reality not intrinsically their own. Emblematic of Southern history, referring to something more or less or other than itself, the history of Thomas Sutpen loses the immediacy necessary to its impact and value as an authentically tragic action. To conceive the novel exclusively in terms of historical allegory is not, of course, to do it complete justice. "The undoing of Sutpen's false ambition," according to a recent critic, "illustrates the operation of retributive justice in the human drama; the fall of the South is its larger social representation."⁹ But if Malcolm Cowley's contention that "with a little cleverness, the whole novel might be explained as a connected and logical allegory"¹⁰ is wrong, it is not wrong enough. The correspondences between Sutpen's history and the history of the South may not dominate the novel, but they certainly condition it. The building of *Sutpen's Hundred*, the hero's alliance with the Calvinist shopkeeper from the North, his repudiation and death at the hands of Wash Jones: these derive much of their powerful reality as incidents from their being conceived by the author and perceived by the reader within the historical frame of reference.

The characters and events of the novel appear, for that matter, within so many frames of reference operating simul-

⁹ Sullivan, "The Tragic Design of *Absalom, Absalom!*," p. 555.

¹⁰ Malcolm Cowley, "Introduction," *The Viking Portable Faulkner* (New York, 1951), p. 13.

taneously that they can scarcely be visualized as having any reality outside them. The religious and sexual idiosyncrasies of Rosa Coldfield's account serve as a frame to give Sutpen a symbolic value as a demon, an ogre, a species of Miltonic archangel, while Mr. Compson's temperamental idiosyncrasies—his fatalism, his passion as gentleman and scholar for the literature of Greek antiquity—act in the same fashion to give Sutpen his symbolic value as a hero in the tradition of classical tragedy. The example of Greek tragedy exercises, in fact, an influence as a frame of reference quite independently of Mr. Compson's intermittent narrative contributions. "The continuing (though loose) analogies which exist between Sutpen and Oedipus, Sutpen's sons and Eteocles and Polyneices, Judith and Antigone, suggest," it has been said on good authority, "that the Oedipus trilogy might have served as a general guide in the drafting of the plot."¹¹ Although an equally strong case might be made for the *Oresteia* as a source, it should be clear from this how little the characters and events of *Absalom, Absalom!*, tangled as they are in a positive jungle of frames and symbols, can emerge in lights and lines of their own and hence how little the Sutpen story can materialize, for all its great intrinsic possibilities, as a fully articulated tragedy.

The plot of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* itself is not, true enough, *sui generis*. Michael Henchard's story bears striking resemblances to the classical Oedipus legend and to the biblical Saul legend.¹² It is bound up, too, like Sutpen's story, with the history of a particular time and place, the conflict between the mayor and his antagonist referring to the larger conflict between traditional and mechanical methods of tilling the soil. Neither the literary nor the historic frames of reference, however—and they are hardly explicit enough to deserve the name—so dominate the novel that character and action are translated into that ulterior reality where images

¹¹ Lind, *op. cit.*, pp. 889-890.

¹² See D. A. Dike, "A Modern Oedipus: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*," *Essays in Criticism*, II (April, 1952), 169-179; and Julian Moynahan, "The Mayor of Casterbridge and the Old Testament's First Book of Samuel: A Study of Some Literary Relationships," *PMLA*, LXXI (March, 1956), 118-130.

become symbols. The parallels with Greek tragedy and Southern history are part of the very substance of *Absalom, Absalom!*, but the parallels with Oedipus and Saul and the history of local agriculture are no part of the substance of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Hence the impact of Faulkner's novel depends, as that of Hardy's does not, on our recognition of the analogies, on our intimations of the symbolic value of the characters and incidents. Sutpen must stand for the old economic dispensation of the South as Henchard is not required to stand for the old economic dispensation of Wessex.

Where Faulkner's hero has little value or reality, then, outside the symbolic dimensions established in the novel, Hardy's can claim reality and value as an image without ever having to claim reality and value as a symbol. And where the plot of Faulkner's novel is transvaluated by the literary and historical frames of reference, the plot of Hardy's novel does not require a greater valuation than it already possesses as a thing in itself. Henchard can be so very powerfully himself because he is not asked, like Sutpen, to be something or somebody else; and the action in which he participates can evoke so powerful a reality because, unlike that of *Absalom, Absalom!*, it is under no obligation to evoke a reality other than its own. The vitality of character and plot in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is weakened no more by the vitality of the symbol than by the vitality of the narrator and the vitality of language. It is Hardy's freedom from Jamesian and Joycean sophistications in the art of the novel that makes possible the tragic consummation of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, as it is Faulkner's commitment to these sophistications that prevents a tragic consummation in *Absalom, Absalom!*

A novel's qualifications as tragedy, or its lack of them, perhaps provide only very dubious grounds for critical discriminations. Less capable of envisioning the ultimate peace of traditional tragedy than Hardy was, more faithful to the terms of experience than to the arbitrary canons of a tragic art, Faulkner was evidently more concerned to define the tensions than to resolve them. If *Absalom, Absalom!* is disabled,

then, as tragedy, it is only fair to suggest that it may have been prepared for other destinies, destinies different from but not necessarily inferior to those for which *The Mayor of Casterbridge* was evidently prepared. When all this has been said, however, there remains the hard consideration that if the novel cannot meet the challenge of tragedy, cannot rise to the most heroic perception of which the human imagination is capable, then a serious judgment on the limitations of its form, or on the limitations of the age that fathered the form, is necessarily involved. And if this is the case, then *The Mayor of Casterbridge* represents a more remarkable achievement than has generally been recognized. It demonstrates not only that the purposes of tragedy are better served by the old theory of the novel than by the new, but also that the historic recalcitrance of the form to the profundities of tragedy is by no means absolute. It demonstrates that there may be a prosaics as well as a poetics of tragedy.

THE "FRAIL CHINA JAR" AND THE RUDE HAND OF CHAOS

Murray Krieger

CONTRARY TO THE USUAL IMPRESSION, recent critical approaches to literature, at their most valuable, need not restrict themselves to the ivory tower of formalism, in which analytical ingenuity is paraded for its own sake. Elsewhere, arguing from aesthetic principles, I have tried to prove that, far from stifling extra-literary relations, the so-called new criticism can allow literature to be uniquely revelatory of life, to give us a new rendering of the stuff of experience. But here I should like to venture even further in an effort to correct the common misconception that sees modern criticism as no more than formalistic. For despite the fact that this criticism grew up largely in opposition to the historical disciplines, I shall here attempt to show how literature—if it is seen thoroughly and with new-critical care as literature—can illuminate in a rather special way even so un-new-critical an area as the history of ideas.¹

To this end I should like to conduct a somewhat reckless allegorical excursion in order to assure myself the freedom I need to explore an extraordinary dramatic relation between perhaps the two greatest poems of the 18th century, *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad*. It may be that I shall have to construct a kind of mythology of idealized generalizations which are to pass for the psychological history of the

¹ Perhaps I shall be, in part, answering Mr. Roy Harvey Pearce's challenge to my book, *The New Apologists for Poetry*, in his essay in the *Kenyon Review* of Autumn, 1958 ("Historicism Once More," pp. 554-591). There he asks me to extend my methodology into a new historicism, one that would move from my acknowledgement of the creative role of language in the making of the poem to an insistence on the historical dimension of this creatively endowed language. Consequently this language would be seen as expressing the inner stance of its author as a man in time and in culture: poetry would come to be treated as a kind of existential anthropology. While this essay was written before I saw Mr. Pearce's, it may very well have been his kind of objective that I have been looking toward.

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tensions of the 18th-century artist by allowing certain ideological commonplaces to bear more weight than the more careful historian may believe they can sustain. And I may end by doing violence to other more widely accepted commonplaces of the orthodox historian. But surely this is one of the chief functions of poetry, this violation of the commonplace. Finally, my claims may be seen to ignore the significance of the chronological relations among *The Rape of the Lock*, *An Essay on Man*, and *The Dunciad* by assuming something like a simultaneity among poems spread among three decades. I hope that the facts of chronology will not be seen to disturb more essential dialectical relations among the works of this single poet. Let me add only this further apology: that I mean to suggest these dramatic and allegorical extensions of the poems no more than tentatively, even hypothetically—hoping only that by being suggestive they may be especially illuminating in a way that a more literal transcription would prefer to ignore, perhaps (let me admit the possibility) because the latter, in its scholarly caution, is more anxious to avoid being wrong. But the extensions that follow—at the worst—would have been nice if they were there to be justly read this way. They do make for an exciting drama of the 18th-century mind at work.

I

It is by this late date not at all original to claim that Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* is double-edged throughout, that in it he celebrates the artificial world of 18th-century social convention even as he satirizes it. Even Mr. Geoffrey Tillotson, the rather orthodox editor of the poem in the Twickenham Edition, acknowledges:

The social mockery of the *Rape of the Lock* is not simple, does not make a pat contribution to single-mindedness. The world of the poem is vast and complicated. It draws no line of cleavage between its "seriousness" and its mockery. Belinda is not closed up in a rigid coterie which Clarissa and the rest of the poem mock at. Pope, fierce and tender by turns, knows

no more than Hazlitt, "whether to laugh or weep" over the poem. He is aware of values which transcend his satire:

Belinda smil'd, and all the World was gay

and

If to her share some Female Errors fall,
Look on her Face, and you'll forget 'em all.

The poem provides a picture rather than a criticism; or, rather, the criticism is so elaborate, shifting, constellated, that the intellect is baffled and demoralized by the emotions. One is left looking at the face of the poem as at *Belinda's*.

But this is all he has to say. He follows his hunch no further. In a well known essay, Mr. Cleanth Brooks argues in a more extensive and highly detailed fashion that our awareness, through Pope's double meanings, of the biological facts that lie just beneath the artful façade of the poem and of the social mannerisms of *Belinda's* world creates a two-way irony that admires even as it patronizes. Thus for Mr. Brooks also the poem does more than mock at a "tempest in a teapot." Many of my observations about the poem will be all too obviously related to his. But even he has not quite pursued his approach to this poem to a unified conclusion, resting content—as he all too often does in *The Well Wrought Urn*—with merely complicating the dimensions of the poem and of the irony it exploits and so leaving it, exposed but not regrouped, in all its multiplicity. Mr. Allen Tate, in an analysis he has never to my knowledge published, moves from Mr. Brooks' scattered insights to an over-all conception of the poem as metonymy and thus as what Mr. William Empson has defined as pastoral. It is this notion I should like to develop here.

Insofar as we view the poem as a mockery of the self-conscious seriousness displayed by trivial characters over a trivial occurrence, we see them, in their self-importance, indulging the logical fallacy of metonymy: they have mistaken the lock of hair, actually incapable of being violated, for the lady's body—vulnerable but unassaulted by the baron. Similarly, they have taken their rarefied and pomaded world of conventional play for the great world, that changeable heroic world

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of princes and states in which rape brings vengeance and catastrophe lurks. Hence the mock-epic. Granted that these are the delusions of the complacency fostered by an artificial society, and that Pope forces us to see them as such. But surely, for all its absurdities, this self-contained and inconsequential "toyshop" world can manage an aesthetic perfection and (from the standpoint of an ugly, lurking reality) a dis-involvement that allow it a purity along with its thinness.

We may rightly smile—perhaps in envy as well as in disdain—at the metonymic wigs that are fighting in this world of decorum instead of the gory, if more glorious, lords of heroic mold; for, as Pope so brilliantly arranges things, the disembodied wigs fight, properly, with sword-knots instead of swords ("Where wigs with wigs, with sword-knots sword-knots strive"). The "toyshop" society that self-importantly mistakes itself for reality is defender, too, of "honor," that fashionable word out of Restoration comedy which so befits this world of fashion. Appearance is all. The lock of hair is to this world what the actual body is to the real world, except that the former is even more to be cherished since reputation is the only value in the world of fashion. So the rape of the lock is more to be avoided in honor's world than are the more sordid, but less openly proclaimed, assaults in classical legend and in London back-alleys. Belinda, perhaps unconsciously, acknowledges as much in her lament to the baron,

Oh hadst thou, cruel! been content to seize
Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!

In honor's world the lock is the woman as the wig is the man and the sword-knot his weapon. There simply is no flesh and blood in these people—or rather in these artificially created shadows of people—so that, even without looking to John Milton, we should understand why it is fitting that:

No common weapons in their hands are found,
Like Gods they fight, nor dread a mortal wound.

And of course not Belinda herself is flesh and blood—at least not the artful and perfected abstraction that Belinda creates of herself in administering "the sacred rites of pride." It is a

brilliant stroke in this dressing-table passage that the real Belinda is only the priestess at the altar, and that the goddess whom she decorates as she worships is her reflection in the mirror. She worships not fleshly or cosmic, but "cosmetic pow'rs" whose kingdom is not of this world but of the elegant world of appearance. The Belinda who, fully created in artifice, is to enter honor's world on the Thames and in Hampton Court, is not a woman but a goddess, a disembodied image: she is the insubstantial Belinda, composed of smiles that have been repaired and of the "purer blush." Deprived of the imperfections that mar—even as they humanize—flesh and blood reality, the painted blush is indeed aesthetically purer than a natural blush, an improvement upon it. And it is morally purer too; for it is caused not by blood—by any natural, unmaidenly immodesty—but by the cool calculations of art. It is far less spontaneous, or suggestive, than the blush earlier induced in her dreams by the disguised Ariel:

A Youth more glitt'ring than a Birth-night Beau
(That ev'n in slumber caus'd her cheek to glow).

This world of images, from which—as in Yeats' Byzantium—the fury and the mire of human veins are excluded, is also the world of play, and thus of innocence. And it is the sense of play that justifies Pope's frequent and brilliant use of zeugma in the poem. When Ariel suggests to his "sylphs and sylphids" what catastrophes may threaten Belinda, he couples² "real" dangers with merely fashionable ones:

Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,
Or some frail China jar receive a flaw;

² I am using the term *zeugma* in a broader sense than its strict grammatical meaning would permit. For example, in the two couplets I quote in what follows, only the line: "Or stain her honour, or her new brocade" is an actual instance of it. Obviously it is only a triangular affair, so that the two objects must be yoked by the single, double-voiced verb. In this sense, the other lines are merely antitheses of four distinct parts, with each object controlled by its own verb. My point is, however, that in a rhetorical if not a grammatical sense, there is a similar yoking of two disparate worlds in all these instances. In rare cases this yoking is reflected in the short-circuited perfection of the grammatical device; the other cases are effective but less complete and thus less brilliant examples yielding the same rhetorical effect.

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Or stain her honour, or her new brocade;
Forget her pray'rs, or miss a masquerade.

Elsewhere "the virgin's cheek" pales in a fear that yokes
maidenly dishonor to the loss of the card game:

She sees, and trembles at th'approaching ill,
Just in the jaws of ruin, and Codille.

Or kings captured in battle are yoked to aging virgins, fierce and unrepentant tyrants to an imperfectly dressed young lady. To be sure, these and similar instances emphasize the triviality of the action and thus the poem's mock-heroic aspect. But given this world where images and wigs and sword-knots replace real men and women, where fashion replaces emotion, where "honor" replaces moral earnestness, this very triviality should alone be taken seriously. Utterly inconsequential in contrast to both the heroic world and the sordid everyday world, the insubstantial quality of the world in which woman is recognized as woman only by the clothes she wears and the way her hair is dressed makes it actually unworldly. As a world of play and of art, it is utterly self-contained, self-justified. Absurd as it may be from the standpoint of the heroic and of the everyday world, it is yet an idyllic world whose very purity gives it a unique value. Thus Mr. Tate's characterization of it as pastoral. Even as Pope condescends to its creatures, may he not envy them? May he not be suggesting his admiration of a world in which dress is more significant than tyranny, maidenly attitudes more significant than victories and defeats of princes—and more to the point, the flawing of a china jar more significant than the violation of a virgin? How precious and delicate a world, if utterly thin, irresponsible, and unreal! Or should I not say precious and delicate *because* utterly thin, irresponsible, and unreal? The price of substance, responsibility, and reality—of conscientious social significance—Pope knew only too well, as we do. He computed it for us in the bitterness of his satire elsewhere, and especially in *The Dunciad*. It is as if, seeing as Henry James later did that "life persistently blunders and deviates, loses herself in the sand," like James the artist Pope wanted

to preserve "his grain of gold." And part of him wanted, as a devotee of art for art's sake, or of the world for art's sake, to salvage the world of fashion as that grain of gold.

II

We must ask, then, whether the epic tone and machinery are so easily and so uniformly seen as incongruous as our normal understanding of the mock-heroic would have us believe. Belinda, seen repeatedly as rival to the sun, is treated throughout as a goddess. Now of course this is absurd, as it is meant to be. But is it only absurd? Is it not really, as we have seen, that it is the image of Belinda that appears as the goddess, a kind of sun-goddess? And to the extent that we see her as the world of fashion does—as disembodied and thus not of the dull world of substance and consequence—is she perhaps not in some sense a goddess after all even while she remains the shallow fool of social convention? We have seen already that in a strange sense the terms in which Milton's airy beings do battle are not totally inapplicable here. When early in the poem our humorist asks, "In tasks so bold, can little men engage?" he may be playing a more complex game than that of mere mockery.

Belinda, of course, is warrior-goddess, too. From the time her "awful beauty puts on all its arms," we know that the war between the sexes—limited by the rules of the drawing-room rather than of the Geneva convention—is on. All is directed to the final superhuman battle at the end. We learn that her locks of hair are "nourish'd" and nourished "to the destruction of mankind"; and we are warned by the general claim:

Fair tresses man's imperial race ensnare
And beauty draws us with a single hair.

We begin to suspect that Belinda, Amazon as well as nymph, may be the aggressor as well as the assaulted in the war of love. For after all, the realistic, common-sense view that Pope forces before us, too (and that Clarissa later so painfully rep-

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resents) makes us recognize that behind the masque of the drawing-room lurk the biological and domestic facts of life. The war is finally but a game that disguises the uninspiring realities of the social and sexual mating urge. Since the war is only symbolic and as innocent as mere war-games, no wonder no one is harmed. In Canto V, when the issue is joined, we see death being scattered around by the eyes of various nymphs with wits dying in metaphor and in song and reviving as the lady's frowns change to smiles. Allusions to the sexual act abound in secondary meanings even as on the surface, in the living deaths and the burnings in the flames of love, the stale love-song clichés—dull remnants of a long-outworn Petrarchan convention—continue the melodramatic pretense on a heroic scale. The players must take the game seriously, play it as war—though happily a war without war's consequences—in order to preserve that artful and idyllic purity of their innocent make-believe. Yet, of course, this final battle is not the only one in the poem. To pile absurdity upon absurdity, Pope prepares us for the war-game at the close with the "combat on the velvet plain"—the game of Ombre, that earlier military maneuver disguising sexual reality, in which Belinda barely escaped "the jaws of ruin, and Codille." The card game is a symbolic prophecy of the final battle which, ironically, is itself only symbolic. The earlier battle, symbol behind the symbol, proves the game-like quality of the later: it establishes the later one as pure nonsense, as pure as itself, as pure as games alone are. If all this reminds us of the play-theory of art, it reminds us also of my earlier claim that Pope loves Belinda's world as a true aesthete.

Of course, the unaesthetic world of biological and domestic fact lurks always beneath. Pope is not afraid for us to see it beneath his language, since he wants us to know that he can cherish Belinda's world only in continual awareness of its evasions and delusions: it evades the real world by deluding itself about its own reality. Indeed, Pope is so anxious for us to be aware of his awareness of the real world that he forces an explicit representative of it upon us by inserting Clarissa's speech into a later edition of the poem. But he has shown this

awareness to us all along in the sexual secondary meanings of phrase after phrase and in the "serious" half of zeugma after zeugma. We must remember also the suggestion that Belinda after all is the aggressor, and that at the crucial moment, before the baron acts, Ariel is rendered powerless by viewing:

... in spite of all her art,
An earthly Lover lurking at her heart.

Surely this is the baron, so that Pope is suggesting that on one level—that of flesh-and-blood reality—Belinda is, to say the least, a willing victim, shrewd enough to know the truth of the pronouncement later made by "grave Clarissa": "... she who scorns a man, must die a maid." But Belinda also—or at least her painted image—is dedicated to the game and will play it through at all costs. So the show of resistance must be maintained, with the mock-battle of love and its sexually suggestive overtones as its proper consequence.

Once Pope feels secure that he has established Belinda's world as one we can cherish, but always with a chuckle, he dares introduce materials from other and realer worlds more openly as if to prove the power of his delicate creation. Thus the biological realities are paraded in the Cave of Spleen whose queen, be it noted, rules "the sex to fifty from fifteen." Or earlier Pope introduces figures of the great world—"Britain's statesmen" and "great Anna"—only to reduce them through zeugma to the pastoral level of his central action, the statesmen foredooming the fall "Of Foreign Tyrants and of Nymphs at home" and Anne, in the famous line, taking tea as well as counsel. Is the great world being transformed to the petty or the petty to the great? A question appropriate to the double-edged nature of the mock-heroic. Surely it can increase the stature of normally trivial subject-matter by playing up that within it that surprises us with its hidden grandeur. There is also Pope's daring glance at the sordid everyday world in which:

The hungry Judges soon the sentence sign,
And wretches hang that jurymen may dine.

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But this break into Belinda's world is no defect. It rather reinforces the wonderfully inconsequential pastoralism of that world. This brief, terrorizing glance at the alternative should send us clutching at the innocuous grace of the "toy-shop" where we need fear neither hunger nor execution though we may have the make-believe equivalent of each. And, as if to prove the point, Pope turns almost at once to Belinda, who like the statesman wants victory in war and more important, like the judge, wants to assign her own arbitrary sentence of execution: she will "foredoom" in her own way.

Belinda now, whom thirst of fame invites,
Burns to encounter two advent'rous Knights,
At Ombre singly to decide their doom.

Of course, it is Clarissa who furnishes the most serious intrusion upon Belinda's world by the alien world of unde-luded common-sense reality. It is she, Pope tells us in his note, who is "to open more clearly the moral of the poem." How inspired a touch that earlier it was Clarissa who per-versely furnished the baron with the scissors he used to com-mit his assault.³ By all means let her be the earlier Clarissa who even then, in her anti-pastoralism, plotted the downfall of the make-believe world of artifice. In her speech, she breaks all the rules, says all that is unmentionable, shatters the mirror in order to replace the painted image with the flesh-and-blood creature of fleeting charms who marries, breeds, ages, and wears, has all sorts of dire consequences—eventually dust and the grave. Of course, she alone speaks only the truth. And so she does open the moral, but only to make us recognize its price. No wonder that "no applause ensu'd." She is intolerable even if she is right. In Belinda's world, the fancy cheats too well to be abandoned for its grim alternative.

Even the sylphs, Pope's magnificent addition to his heroic machinery, are implicated, at least by negation, in the quarrel

³ Although Pope in this note speaks of her as a new character, he must mean, as Mr. Tillotson supposes, that she is new as a speaking character.

Belinda's world has with Clarissa. We have seen that Ariel first appears to Belinda in her dream as so attractive a youth as to cause in her a blush of desire. And we may see him throughout the poem as an unearthly rival to the baron, the "earthly Lover." It is Ariel who speaks the magnificent couplet:

Know further yet; whoever fair and chaste
Rejects mankind, is by some Sylph embrac'd.

What a stroke to rhyme "chaste" with "embrac'd"! Surely the latter word is to retain its fully sexual flavor here as Ariel is in effect telling Belinda to save herself for him. And as we turn to Pope's words in his dedicatory epistle to Arabella Fermor, his Belinda, we note the different, the more-than-mortal sort of embrace that sylphs are capable of. How uproariously he toyed with the poor girl:

For they say, any Mortals may enjoy the most intimate Familiarities with these gentle Spirits, upon a Condition very easie to all true *Adepts*, an inviolate Preservation of Chastity.

This embrace, then, is the empty equivalent of the sexual act in that rarefied world of fashion guarded by the decorous sylphs. Ariel is warning Belinda away from flesh and blood, from yielding to the realistic truths of life and marriage and death attested to by Clarissa. As an image, eternalized in art, dehumanized in perfection, she must remain Ariel's alone. It is he, anxious to protect his own, who keeps her safe from assault and seduction. And so, as he tells Belinda, he comes to represent "honor," the word used by us "men below" to characterize the maidenly purity the sylph has ensured. No wonder, then, that he is so solicitous and that, once he spies:

An earthly Lover lurking at her heart.
Amaz'd confus'd, he found his pow'r expir'd,
Resign'd to fate, and with a sigh retir'd.

He must, with Belinda, yield the field to the baron. But she yields only the metonymic symbol rather than the thing itself; and she yields only momentarily, since she returns to Ariel's world of honor by calling for war. The sylphs, then, "wondrous fond of place," with their innumerable ranks reflecting

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all the levels of cosmic and human order, are the ideal super-human attendants of the empty and yet perfect world of fashionable decorum. And they are as ineffectual, their airiness being an extension of the airiness of that disembodied world whose integrity they claim to protect.

As his *Homer* shows Pope to have viewed it, in the old and revered heroic tradition the world of serious significance and consequence and the world of high play and the grand manner were one. Actuality was somehow hospitable to decorum. But in the dwarfed mock-heroic world Pope sees about him, actuality, in becoming sordid, rejects all style: its insolent insistence allows decorum to make only a comic appearance as its pale reflection. Instead of the all-accomplishing homeric heroes, Pope must accept either the jurymen and wretches or the wigs and sword-knots, either Clarissa's breeder or Ariel's nymph of the "purer blush."

All this must return us to my earlier insistence that insofar as Pope values Belinda's world which from the standpoint of reality he must satirize, he values it for an aesthetic purity that frees it from ugliness even as it leaves it utterly insignificant. It is, as I have said, a world created for art's sake, one in which the zeugma can finally create a miraculous inversion, so that the "frail China jar" becomes more precious than virginity—in effect comes to be not merely a symbol for virginity, but even an artificial substitute for it in this world of artifice.

III

But is there not, in Pope's day, a larger and more important, if equally unreal world, created for art's sake: the world of Epistle I of *An Essay on Man*? (I call a halt after Epistle I, since Pope opens Epistle II with those brilliant and tragic lines on man's middle nature.) Here, the aesthetic perfection of the universe is set forth and adored. In the conclusion to the epistle, we are warned in our blindness not to claim any imperfection in the infallible order that enfolds all. And in these famous lines occur the parallel oppositions that are to fade as we recognize the full and true cosmos:

All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;
All Chance, Direction which thou canst not see;
All Discord, Harmony not understood;
All partial Evil, universal Good.

Is not such a universe decorum itself, decorum erected into a cosmic principle, all the spheres and the links in the chain of being taking and keeping their places with a propriety resembling that of the sylphs, and of the drawing-room? And the seeming disturbances within it are seeming only: the discord that is a false front for harmony reminds us of the battles in *The Rape of the Lock* that are only decorous and conventional mock-battles, war-games that secure rather than threaten the world of fashion. The dangerous casualty of flesh and blood gives way to the controlled inevitability of art.

In *An Essay on Man* we are given a kind of ersatz and decapitated replica of the unified, catholic, psychologically and aesthetically soothing 13th-century universe. It is a replica that represents a last, desperate, brilliant postulation in the face of the devastations of the Renaissance and of modern science that left the medieval world (or dream-world) a shambles. It even rationalizes the static generalizations of early modern science by analogizing them and coming up with the "Newtonian world-machine." It thus represents also a supreme act of human will, the will to order—and to sanity. It is, finally then, an aesthetic construct only. Hence Pope's insistence in these final lines of Epistle I that we leave this delicately created china jar unflawed. (One can, of course, see the same forces, the same insistence on order at all costs, reflected in Pope's indiscriminate reduction of the troublesome dimensions of his world to the uniformity of his perfected version of the heroic couplet.) As the Humes and Kants convincingly reveal in shattering the false, dogmatic security of this world, the price of the construct is a metaphysical flimsiness—a naiveté, the reverse side of its symmetrical delicacy—that made it easy prey to the rigors of critical philosophy and the ravages of social-economic revolution.

Is it not, however, rather smug of us to assume that minds as sensitive and probing as Pope's could believe in their

THE "FRAIL CHINA JAR"

dream-world so utterly and simply? That they could rest so secure in an unquestioning acceptance of this architecturally perfect model-universe? Perhaps at some level of their consciousness they were alive to the ultimate futility of their desperate postulation. Nevertheless, postulate they had to in western man's final attempt to resist universal disintegration. But in this last assertion of cosmic solidarity there may have been the insecurity that was aware of its vulnerability and of the surrounding hordes of modernism already closing in. I am here suggesting, of course, that *The Rape of the Lock* is Pope's testament of the aesthetic universe, one that reveals a nostalgic yearning for it along with a critical acknowledgment of its impracticability; and that *The Dunciad* is his bleak acceptance of the chaotic forces he most feared.

One can account in a general way for the enlightenment's ethic and metaphysic as well as for its aesthetic by treating as synonyms for what is to be avoided all the first terms in the two couplets I have quoted from *An Essay on Man*, and as synonyms for what is to be sought all the second terms. Thus nature, chance, discord, yielding partial evil; and art, direction, harmony, yielding universal good. And it is clear why the unchanging permanence of art must be preferred to the dynamic casualty of history, the china jar to unpredictable flesh and blood. But the spirit of *Clarissa* has been abroad and it leads away from art to the realities of history. It is ultimately to the last book of *The Dunciad* that she points, to Pope's prophecy of the chaos that modern historical reality brings. Perhaps we can re-interpret a couplet from this last book for our own purposes:

But sober History restrain'd her rage,
And promis'd Vengeance on a barb'rous age.

Here in the victory of Dullness is her vengeance, what she has saved for us in the world of jurymen and wretches.

It is clear that *The Dunciad* extends in its satirical range far beyond the literary world to the ethical and metaphysical. It is clear also that to the mock-epic quality of the poem is joined a more serious, a not much less than epic—almost

Dantesque—quality. There is nothing slight about the Empire of Dullness. The significance of its action is hardly beneath heroic treatment. For these creatures literally absorb all the world. Unlike the action of *The Rape of the Lock* their action has consequences indeed, woeful ones. Their action is heroic in scope; it is repulsive and base on the very grandest scale. While it reverses all heroic values, it does so in heroic terms.

Then rose the Seed of Chaos, and of Night,
To blot out Order, and extinguish Light.

The delicate world for art's sake is overcome by ponderous dullness, by what James termed "clumsy Life again at her stupid work." Throughout the last book of *The Dunciad* it is the discord of partiality that acts the role of destroyer: "Joy to great Chaos! let Division reign." We find the dunces, like their Laputan cousins in Swift, divorcing words from things and thought, cherishing minute parts for their own sakes, refusing to relate them to any whole. Division indeed, and subdivision. And what is chaos for Pope but the multiplication of parts run wild? Discord is no longer resolvable into harmony, or partial evil into universal good. Pope is looking forward to the destruction of totality, to the destruction of the long vogue of naive philosophical Realism, by critical philosophy—and ever more critical philosophy even down to our contemporary Oxford school. The increasing attractions of partiality to man's microscopic tendencies and the dogged dedication to immediate truth replace the dream-world with a piecemeal chaos.

In *The Dunciad* Pope sees this infinitely divided world, the modern world, as the one finally suited to man, imperfect and partial as he prefers to be. Pope sees the wholeness and sameness and sanity of the art-world as beyond man, now with the placid classic vision no longer his. Man will prefer to be Clarissa, who would destroy an aesthetically satisfying world for the dull truths of homely reality and utilitarian candor. Perhaps Pope comes to feel that he has hoped for too much from man: the capacity for a wilful naiveté that will leave

undisturbed the golden world, well wrought like the china jar. Perhaps this is part of what Pope had in mind in dedicating *The Dunciad* to Swift who, in a famous letter in 1725, had chided Pope and Bolingbroke for a rationalistic optimism that rated man too high and that could result only in an unreasoning hatred of man for falling short. Swift was ready from the start to settle for less, to acknowledge the sordid, to avoid fabricating a purified, pastoral, anti-Clarissa world, as a comparison of the dressing-rooms of his poetic heroines with that of Belinda will readily testify. Perhaps Pope's dedication was his way of acknowledging that Swift was right and that the poem which was to follow is a testament of hatred to those who have proved him wrong, even as he had always feared himself to be. For the usual picture of Pope as pure rationalist must be balanced by that of the subterranean Pope who is the pure and frightened skeptic. By the time of *The Dunciad*, Book the Fourth, Pope may know the dream is shortly to be smashed forever. But his was not a dogmatic slumber, or a slumber at all. It was an artful delusion—of himself and of us—by a mind too aesthetically fine to accept the universe as less than a work of art. He would have the china jar, no matter how frail, although the prophet within forced from him at last the poem that acknowledged its destruction by the rude hands swinging out from the motley mob that clutters *The Dunciad*.

IV

My fullest measure of Pope's utterance, then, would find a voice given to the felt subterranean pressures that moved his age despite his and its overt assurances: pressures generated by the tensions between rationalism and empiricism, between classicism and modernism, between confidence in a mechanism that roots the hospitable universe and anxiety about the unknown alien something or nothing that may finally lurk underneath everything out there. As a poet, through the plasticity of his brilliantly controlled and maneuvered language, Pope reached into the unvoiced capacities for praise and wonder and laughter and lament in his world and sur-

mounted the ideological commonplaces of his time to voice all at once; even, of course, while never yielding his finally classical hold on the things of life, those precious if dainty things that in their arbitrary and nonsensical way order life and preserve sanity—and civilization. For these are the things that shape a culture even as they create its vulnerability, the transience that is built into it as one of its most charming features.

In doing all this, Pope was also proving the role and the power of poetry. He was demonstrating the special privilege of poetry to move beyond those facile propositions—drawn from a few “spokesmen” in prose and from the most obvious voice extorted from its poets—that supposedly characterize the inner “spirit of an age”; the privilege of poetry to reveal the more-than-propositional (and less-than-propositional) existential shape, the true inwardness, of that inner spirit. That which makes it of man’s spirit rather than of a textbook’s logic. Thus to the extent that Pope, through his maneuvers of language, becomes involved, at whatever level of consciousness, in any of the complexities of attitude and value, of hopes and frightening realizations, that I have been claiming to find—and I might call also upon the testimony of his friend Swift to support me—I would want to claim that it is in such as these that the full history of ideas in Pope and in the 18th century must be found; that any intellectual history which ignores these dimensions in the interest of lesser men’s “documents” (and Pope himself was frequently a lesser man, as is any poet in his less than most creative moments) has sacrificed adequacy to discursive convenience. It is incomplete, inhumanized, forcing the true “spirit of the age” into an historian’s *a priori* (or at least unexistential, pre-poetic) categories. For the ideas of an age may stem out of the more-than-ideological fullness of the poet rather than make their way into his work as a commonplace element that reduces it to themselves. And, so long as this remains a conceivable hypothesis, the historian of ideas had better worry about whether ideas—the ideas that finally come to found intel-

lectual institutions—may not prior to their formulation as ideas be born, in an existential non-ideological form, in the fullness and the tensions of a poet's work rather than come to die there after a long, dull, existentially unchallenged institutional life of their own.

"Tott'ring . . . without a wind" by virtue of its very delicacy, Pope's aesthetic construct of a universe is unable to withstand the merest touch of the hand of reality. It now lies in the "glitt'ring dust and painted fragments" of "rich China vessels fall'n from high." But it did not *only* crash, though *The Dunciad* chronicles that it did. Thanks to Pope, we can cherish with him the very fragility that assured its perfection even as it guaranteed its destruction. For, like Belinda's lock, even as it ceased being a force down here, the muse "saw it upward rise." We have perhaps been too taken with the brilliance of Pope's satire and mock-heroics to sense fully the almost single-minded tribute to the lock and thus to Belinda's world contained in the moving final lines in which Pope enshrines the lock eternally in his heavens. It is, after all, one of the stars the Empire of Dullness threatens with extinction at the apocalyptic close of *The Dunciad*. So Pope's universe, seemingly destroyed, does with Belinda's lock "upward rise,"

Though mark'd by none but quick, poetic eyes:
(So Rome's great founder to the heav'ns withdrew,
To Proculus alone confess'd in view)
A sudden Star, it shot through liquid air,
And drew behind a radiant trail of hair.
Not Berenice's locks first rose so bright,
The heav'ns bespangling with dishevel'd light.
The Sylphs behold it kindling as it flies,
And pleas'd pursue its progress through the skies.
This the Beau monde shall from the Mall survey,
And hail with music its propitious ray. . . .
Then cease, bright Nymph! to mourn thy ravish'd hair,
Which adds new glory to the shining sphere!
Not all the tresses that fair head can boast,
Shall draw such envy as the Lock you lost.

For, after all the murders of your eye,
When, after millions slain, yourself shall die;
When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,
And all those tresses shall be laid in dust,
This Lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame,
And midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name.

As in *The Dunciad*, Pope acknowledges the death of the art-world he has already immortalized in *The Rape of the Lock*, so here he finally can afford to acknowledge Clarissa's truth about the death of the physical Belinda, but only because he is granting a resurrection to that metonymic lock which has been appropriately hailed by the "Beau monde" that it symbolizes.

For, after all the murders of your eye,
When, after millions slain, yourself shall die;
When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,
And all those tresses shall be laid in dust,
This Lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame,
And midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name.

The poem, too, is inscribed there! And with it that illusory universe, like the "Beau monde" constructed as a work of art, whose very artificiality testifies to the persistence, the in-domitible humanity of its creator's classic vision—and to his awareness that the insubstantial nature of this universe could allow it to transcend all that chaos ground into "glitt'ring dust." Powerless against chaos—that disintegrating force of historical reality whose "uncreating word" extinguished "Art after Art"—the frail universe could win immortality with the very evanescent quality that doomed it: for "quick, poetic eyes" it glows, gem-like, a sphere beyond the reach of the "universal Darkness" that buried all.

A POEM OF RESOLUTION

Stanley Edgar Hyman

I

AN ADEQUATE CHALLENGE TO POPE's world of artifice and decorum comes with a poem published in the next century. It is "Resolution and Independence," by William Wordsworth, written in 1802 and published five years later. Originally called "The Leech Gatherer," it tells of the poet's inspiring encounter with an old leech gatherer when the poet was in a mood of bleak depression. It is written in twenty rime royal stanzas, iambic pentameter with a rhyme-scheme of ABABBCC.

We know of the incident on which the poem is based from an entry in the Grasmere journal of Wordsworth's sister Dorothy, under the date of October 3, 1800. She writes:

N.B. When Wm. and I returned from accompanying Jones, we met an old man almost double. He had on a coat, thrown over his shoulders, above his waistcoat and coat. Under this he carried a bundle, and had an apron and a night-cap. His face was interesting. He had dark eyes and a long nose. John, who afterwards met him at Wytheburn, took him for a Jew. He was of Scotch parents, but had been born in the army. He had had a wife, and 'a good woman, and it pleased God to bless us with ten children.' All these were dead but one, of whom he had not heard for many years, a sailor. His trade was to gather leeches, but now leeches are scarce, and he had no strength for it. He lived by begging, and was making his way to Carlisle, where he should buy a few godly books to sell. He said leeches were very scarce, partly owing to this dry season, but many years they have been scarce—he supposed it owing to their being much sought after, that they did not breed fast, and were of slow growth. Leeches were formerly 2s. 6d. [per] 100; they are now 30s. He had been hurt in driving a cart, his leg broke, his body driven over, his skull fractured. He felt no pain till he recovered from his first insensibility. It was then late in the evening, when the light was just going away.

In May, 1802, Wordsworth began the poem. Dorothy Wordsworth writes, under May 4:

I wrote *The Leech Gatherer* for him, which he had begun the night before, and of which he wrote several stanzas in bed this morning. It was very hot; we called at Mr. Simpson's door as we passed, but did not go in. We rested several times by the way, read, and repeated *The Leech Gatherer*.

Three days later she writes:

William had slept uncommonly well, so, feeling himself strong, he fell to work at *The Leech Gatherer*; he wrote hard at it till dinner time, then he gave over, tired to death—he had finished the poem.

On May 9, Dorothy Wordsworth notes the start of the re-writing:

William worked at *The Leech Gatherer* almost incessantly from morning till tea-time.

On July 4, two months after he had started the poem and almost two years after the experience, Wordsworth finally concluded his difficult labor, and Dorothy's journal notes "Wm. finished *The Leech Gatherer* today."

II

The revised "Resolution and Independence" has three stages of action. The first, in the first three stanzas, is a movement from antecedent melancholy to joy, in reaction to nature's innocence and beauty after a storm:

There was a roaring in the wind all night;
The rain came heavily and fell in floods;
But now the sun is rising calm and bright;
The birds are singing in the distant woods.

He continues:

All things that love the sun are out of doors;
The sky rejoices in the morning's birth;
The grass is bright with rain-drops;—on the moors
The hare is running races in her mirth;
And with her feet she from the plashy earth
Raises a mist; that, glittering in the sun,
Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

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The poet, "a Traveller then upon the moor," sees the hare, hears the birds, and feels "as happy as a boy":

My old remembrances went from me wholly;
And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy.

As the poet will later say to the old man, "This morning gives us promise of a glorious day."

However, the reassurances of natural beauty and innocence prove inadequate, and the poet is immediately plunged into a deep and apparently unmotivated depression, the poem's second action covering the next four stanzas. Wordsworth writes:

But, as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
Of joy in minds that can no further go,
As high as we have mounted in delight
In our dejection do we sink as low:
To me that morning did it happen so;
And fears and fancies thick upon me came;
Dim sadness—and blind thoughts, I knew not,
nor, could name.

The poet thinks of what might come upon him: "Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty." He realizes that he has been careless, improvident for the future, and recognizes that he can expect no one to care for him. Then the poet thinks of Chatterton, "the marvellous Boy," dead by his own hand before he was eighteen, and of Burns, "who walked in glory and in joy," dying in poverty and misery. The poet concludes:

We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.

The poem's third movement begins in the eighth stanza and continues all through. It consists of a mystic reassurance furnished by the encounter with the leech gatherer. Wordsworth writes:

Yet it befell that, in this lonely place,
When I with these untoward thoughts had striven,
Beside a pool bare to the eye of heaven
I saw a Man before me unaware:
The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs.

He feels that the old man has been "from some far region sent, / To give me human strength, by apt admonishment." The poet marvels to find "In that decrepit man so firm a mind," and concludes that in future fits of doubt and dejection, "I'll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor!"

In the popular opinion, which Wordsworth shared, "Resolution and Independence" is a didactic poem. As Wordsworth was reassured by the old leech gatherer, so the reader with similar problems of worry and depression is taught by his example. In 1833, Wordsworth wrote to a friend: "I wish to be considered as a teacher or as nothing." Earlier, in 1807, the year he published "Resolution and Independence," he wrote to Lady Beaumont of his poems:

Trouble not yourself upon their present reception; of what moment is that compared with what I trust in their destiny?—to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous; this is their office.

That seems to me too simple a view. In *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, A. C. Bradley more shrewdly recognizes that a visionary or apocalyptic quality is the essence of Wordsworth's poetry, and that without it:

Resolution and Independence would lose the imaginative atmosphere which adds mystery and grandeur to the apparently simple 'moral'

This quality is actually the sharp dramatic flash of a transformation, what Kenneth Burke calls a "symbolic action." In "Literature as Equipment for Living" in *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke treats proverbs as symbolic strategies for dealing with human situations, concluding with an extension of his "sociological" categories to all art. Burke writes:

What would such sociological categories be like? They would consider works of art, I think, as strategies for selecting enemies and allies, for socializing losses, for warding off evil eye, for purification, propitiation, and desanctification, consolation and vengeance, admonition and exhortation, implicit commands or instructions of one sort or another.

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In Burke's terms, "Resolution and Independence" is a serious and complicated strategy for pulling oneself out of neurotic depression, and for warding off the real evil eye of psychotic depressive mania. It might operate symbolically for a reader in a comparable situation, but it is hardly the simple moral teaching its author thought.

To get at the poem we must look more closely at the climactic revelation and analyze the experience it embodies. This consists of two visionary moments. In the first, in stanza sixteen, the leech gatherer becomes hallucinatory and magical, like a great mystical flow of energy:

The old Man still stood talking by my side;
But now his voice to me was like a stream
Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;
And the whole body of the Man did seem
Like one whom I had met with in a dream.

In the second, in stanza nineteen, the leech gatherer becomes a timeless recurrence, like Ahasuerus the Wandering Jew (recall that their brother John took him for a Jew):

In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace
About the weary moors continually,
Wandering about alone and silently.

When he first appears, the leech gatherer is a manifestation of nature like the birds and the hare, an old man by a bare pool:

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
Couched on the bald top of an eminence;
Wonder to all who do the same espy,
By what means it could thither come, and whence;
So that it seems a thing endued with sense:
Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself.

He soon becomes more insubstantial:

And, still as I drew near with gentle pace,
Upon the margin of that moorish flood
Motionless as a cloud the old Man stood,
That heareth not the loud winds when they call;
And moveth all together, if it move at all.

Walter Pater wrote in *Appreciations*:

The leech-gatherer on the moor, the woman "stepping westward" are for him natural objects, almost in the same sense as the aged thorn, or the lichened rock on the heath.

Natural objects, however, are not simply that. John Heath-Stubbs reminds us in *Tribute to Wordsworth*, edited by Muriel Spark and Derek Stanford, that for Wordsworth "objects of natural beauty become vehicles of Grace, in the place of the Sacraments of the Church." The old leech gatherer is that *plus* some sort of incarnation of the divine in the human, and as such he can redeem and "save" as earlier animal nature cannot

As he is an embodiment of nature and grace, so the old leech gatherer is a figuration of the poet. Wordsworth sees him hunting leeches in a literary metaphor:

At length, himself unsettling, he the pond
Stirred with his staff, and fixedly did look
Upon the muddy water, which he conned,
As if he had been reading in a book.

His account of the scarcity of leeches is not a business statistic as it is in Wordsworth's encounter with the retired leech gatherer who inspired the poem, but sounds like a poet lamenting the poverty of his poetic inspirations:

Once I could meet with them on every side;
But they have dwindled long by slow decay;
Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may.

The leech gatherer, stirring the leeches about his feet, literally feeding them on his own blood, becomes an incredibly bold metaphor for the poet in his sacrificial role; Chatterton, Burns, or Wordsworth himself, making poetry out of his life's blood. In *Tribute to Wordsworth*, G. S. Fraser writes:

What Wordsworth had met with, of course, what awed and terrified him in the old leech-gatherer, was a dream image of *himself*; of himself as a lonely, patriarchal, godlike figure.

It would be more accurate, I would submit, to say that Wordsworth had met with a *nightmare* image of himself,

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godlike not in power but in sacrificial attributes, a suffering savior in fact. By projecting this terrifying role onto the old man, in Burke's terms of symbolic action, Wordsworth can go on writing poetry purged and restored.

More generally still, the leech gatherer is a figuration of man in various aspects. He is a noble image of suffering humanity:

His body was bent double, feet and head
Coming together in life's pilgrimage;
As if some dire constraint of pain, or rage
Of sickness felt by him in times long past,
A more than human weight upon his frame had cast.

The old man speaks feebly, but his feeble words are gentle, courteous, solemn, lofty:

Choice word and measured phrase, above the reach
Of ordinary men; a stately speech;
Such as grave Livers do in Scotland use,
Religious men, who give to God and man their dues.

"Being old and poor," homeless, "he had many hardships to endure." In this aspect the leech gatherer is not only a type of sorrowful humanity, but a homeopathic vision of Wordsworth's own possible future of poverty and bleakness. A similar encounter with a poverty-stricken soldier in Book IV of *The Prelude* reassures Wordsworth in his vocation as "A dedicated Spirit." The soldier, like the London beggar in Book VII, functions as a scapegoat figure to carry away the curse of future distress. Lionel Trilling, in *The Liberal Imagination*, takes "Resolution and Independence," which he calls "this great poem," to be the "timely utterance" referred to in the "Ode on Intimations of Immortality," and reads it as an exorcising of anxieties about imagined catastrophes: economic destitution, "natural enough in a man under the stress of approaching marriage, for Wordsworth was to be married in October;" and mental distress. We might add, from the poem's early images, the fear of impotence, and another order of reassurance in the imagery.

Finally, the old man stands for God, or a messenger sent

by God. First describing the leech gatherer's appearance, Wordsworth suggests that it might be

by peculiar grace,
A leading from above, a something given.

Concluding the poem in the last stanza, he prays: "'God,' said I, 'be my help and stay secure;'" promising to think of the leech gatherer in moments of doubt. James Russell Lowell has emphasized this feature of Wordsworth's poetry in comparison with that of Pope. Lowell writes in "Wordsworth":

If Pope has made current more epigrams of worldly wisdom, to Wordsworth belongs the nobler praise of having defined for us, and given us for a daily possession, those faint and vague suggestions of other-worldliness of whose gentle ministry with our baser nature the hurry and bustle of life scarcely ever allowed us to be conscious.

III

In terms of these strongly redemptive features in the central experience of the poem, it is interesting to read Wordsworth's own didactic interpretation. In June, 1802, Sara Hutchinson, the sister of his fiancée, criticized the earlier draft of the poem. Wordsworth wrote to her, and through her to her sister Mary:

I am exceedingly sorry that the latter part of the Leech-gatherer has displeased you, the more so because I cannot take to myself (that being the case) much pleasure or satisfaction in having pleased you in the former part. I will explain to you in prose my feeling in writing that poem and then you will be better able to judge whether the fault be mine or yours or partly both. I describe myself as having been exalted to the highest pitch of delight by the joyousness and beauty of Nature; and then as depressed, even in the midst of those beautiful objects, to the lowest dejection and despair. A young Poet in the midst of the happiness of Nature is described as overwhelmed by the thought of the miserable reverses which have befallen the happiest of all men, *viz.* Poets. I think of this till I am so deeply impressed with it, that I consider the manner in which I was rescued from my dejection and despair almost

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as an interposition of Providence. Now whether it was by peculiar grace, A leading from above—A person reading this Poem with feelings like mine will have been awed and con-
trouled, expecting almost something spiritual or supernatural. What is brought forward? 'A lonely place, a Pond,' 'by which an old man *was*, far from all house or home': not *stood*, not *sat*, but *was*—the figure presented in the most naked simplicity possible. This feeling of spirituality or supernaturalness is again referred to as being strong in my mind in this passage. How came he here? thought I, or what can he be doing? I then describe him, whether ill or well is not for me to judge with perfect confidence, but this I can confidently affirm, that though I believe God has given me a strong imagination, I cannot conceive a figure more impressive than that of an old Man like this, the survivor of a Wife and ten children, travelling along among the mountains and all lonely places, carrying with him his own fortitude, and the necessities which an unjust state of society has entailed upon him. You say and Mary (that is you can say no more than that) the poem is very well after the introduction of the old man, this is not true, if it is not more than very well it is very bad—there is no intermediate state. You speak of his speech as tedious: everything is tedious when one does not read with the feelings of the Author. *The Thorn* is tedious to hundreds; and so is *The Idiot Boy* to hundreds. It is in the character of the old man to tell his story, which an impatient reader must necessarily feel as tedious. But, Good God, such a figure, in such a place; a pious, self-respecting, miserably infirm and [] Old Man tell such a tale!

My dear Sara, it is not a matter of indifference whether you are pleased with this figure and his employment; it may be comparatively so, whether you are pleased or not with his Poem; but it is of the utmost importance that you should have had pleasure from contemplating the fortitude, independence, persevering spirit, and the general moral dignity of this old man's character. Your feelings about the Mother, and the Boys with the Butterfly, were not indifferent: it was an affair of whole continents of moral sympathy. I will talk more with you on this when we meet—at present, farewell and Heaven for ever bless you.

Dorothy Wordsworth added a scolding note of her own:

When you happen to be displeased with what you may suppose to be the tendency or moral of any poem which William writes, ask yourself whether you have hit upon the real ten-

dency and true moral, and above all never think that he writes for no reason but merely because a thing happened—and when you feel any poem of his to be tedious, ask yourself in what spirit it was written—whether merely to tell the tale and be through with it, or to illustrate a particular character or truth.

Ironically Wordsworth appears to have accepted Sara Hutchinson's criticism to the extent of rewriting the poem to leave out the details of the old man's family history that she found tedious, and he probably changed the title to emphasize the significance he thought she had missed.

IV

A glance at Wordsworth's poetic techniques seems in order. The personality of the poet is very much in evidence in "Resolution and Independence," not only as a participant in the meeting, but commenting directly on the experience, as when he says of leech-gathering: "Employment hazardous and wearisome!" One of Wordsworth's resources is the pun. The pun in "moorish flood" is obviously an extraneous and unintended suggestion, as is "grave livers." However, "be my help and stay secure" is certainly a deliberate ambiguity, and quite a poignant one, in which "stay" is both a noun and an imperative verb addressed to God, and the "resolution" in the title means not only that the old man is resolute but that Wordsworth's trouble has been resolved. When Wordsworth is bad he is terrible, like the lines:

Wonder to all who do the same espy,
By what means it could thither come, and whence;

quoted earlier, or the terrible flatness in the last stanza:

And soon with this he other matter blended,
Cheerfully uttered, with demeanour kind,
But stately in the main;

When H. A. Taine, in his *History of English Literature*, said of Wordsworth essentially what Wordsworth and his contemporaries said of Pope, that he wrote rhymed prose, Taine had such lines in mind.

A POEM OF RESOLUTION

Bradley, who called "Resolution and Independence" "the most Wordsworthian of Wordsworth's poems, and the best test of ability to understand him," comments:

When we read it, we find instead lines of extraordinary grandeur, but, mingled with them, lines more pedestrian than could be found in an impressive poem from any other hand.

We must remember the extraordinary grandeur as well as the flatness. For me, the grandeur is represented best by the first four lines of stanza seventeen:

My former thoughts returned: the fear that kills;
And hope that is unwilling to be fed;
Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills;
And mighty Poets in their misery dead.

Herbert Read's *Wordsworth* makes the poet almost an angst-ridden Existentialist contemporary with us. He writes:

All in all, Wordsworth's philosophy is a noble one, and because it was fashioned in an age of disillusionment, and in a mood of almost helpless despair, it is a philosophy that has particular significance for our own age.

It has been charged that Wordsworth restored poetry to natural speech after the artifice of the Augustans, but then developed natural speech into a new kind of artifice. "Artifice," however, is only a somewhat slighting way of saying "art," "craft." If Wordsworth replaced Pope's convention of good sense elegantly put with a convention of passionate feeling baldly put, it is equally a style that can convey the deepest truths of experience.

FRANZ KAFKA: BETWEEN THE PARADISE AND THE LABYRINTH

Walter A. Strauss

I

"THERE IS A GOAL, BUT NO WAY; what we call way is only wavering." Thus runs one of Kafka's most striking aphorisms (No. 26): it defines his own quest, and, by implication, man's spiritual dilemma in the modern world. Kafka's works are, as Erich Heller wrote,¹ characterized by a "negative transcendence"; Kafka is a man passionately yearning for an Absolute that is never quite within reach.

Yet Franz Kafka was first of all a writer, not a theologian. "God does not want me to write, but I, I must," he wrote at the age of twenty. For Proust, writing was the only kind of salvation possible (Proust discovered his goal and found the way); but for Kafka, it was only an attempt to rid himself of the demons of damnation. In a way, it was only a rehearsal of the silence in which his spirit might find the repose that it strove for.

In Kafka's universe there are three major fixtures, all of which are symbolically described in the parable "Before the Law" (Chapter IX of *The Trial*): the supplicant—the "man from the country," the self seeking to recover its freedom, its integrity, and its responsibility; the doorkeeper—image and mask of the world of contingencies and absurdities, the virtually insuperable obstacle; and the Law—open to the naked self, attracting the self by its radiance and inviting the self to discover the hidden Law within its own being, and to judge itself by the Law. Around these three poles of reference a field of energy is generated by the attractive force that emanates from the Law and travels toward the individual, but which by virtue of the conditions of

¹ *The Disinherited Mind* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 215.

human existence must pass through the world, through the realm of necessity. The cross-currents and the discontinuities and the defective wiring in this area of Necessity result in deflections of the current, in short-circuits, and sometimes in electrocutions. The labyrinth stands solidly between the poles of freedom, between the attainment of a paradise here and now. The labyrinth is, therefore, the image of our worldly existence in time and space; paradise, the promised land, is the repose of the spirit beyond the world of time and space, dwelling integrally and indestructibly but secretly within itself.

The vision of such a world necessitates the creation of a myth (insofar as it is a religious world) or of parables (insofar as it is a moral universe). Allegory is not its proper medium, nor can a strictly allegorical interpretation get at the center of Kafka's universe. An allegory suggests a system of referents pointing to a coherent system, or to a doctrine. In Kafka's work there is no such system, not because Kafka is an unsystematic thinker, but because his view of the world makes any rational system impossible. How could one allegorize a labyrinth? Paradise, as Dante showed us, could be allegorically treated; but Kafka's creatures cannot enter any paradise: they can merely long for it or, at best, from a great distance, glimpse its radiance, not unlike Dante's

. . . lo raggio

Dell'Alta Luce, che, da sè, è vera (*Paradiso* XXXIII, 53-4)
(the ray of the Light on high, which, in Itself, is true)

but which is held at an infinite remove from Kafka's heroes, separating them by a void. Kafka, living in a phase of Western culture in which the Sacred and the Profane have become severed—and this condition makes allegory impossible—created a myth that would depict and dramatize this truth of man's situation and at the same time reveal the grotesque masquerade of the Profane usurping the place of the Sacred.

Proust believed that a writer's special inner world, his obsessive view of things, could be ascertained by a close attention to the recurrent patterns in his writings. Kafka's

work appears from this point of view unusually well integrated. His style abounds in obsessive features. First of all, there is the major theme of structures and processes (organizations in space and time): "The Judgment," "The Metamorphosis," "In the Penal Colony," *The Trial*, "The Great Wall of China," *The Castle*, "The Burrow." As a matter of fact, these constitute practically the entirety of Kafka's important fiction from 1912 to 1924. Closely related to this imagery are the messengers and the theme of the summons: "A Country Doctor," *The Trial*, "The Great Wall of China," *The Castle* are the best examples, but actually some form of "call" is present in all of Kafka's later work. Finally, the third theme-cluster has to do with nourishment, and it is particularly prominent in "The Metamorphosis," "In the Penal Colony," "The Hunger Artist," "Investigations of a Dog," and "The Burrow." There are copious minor themes closely related to these major ones—the theme of enclosures and oppressiveness, fatigue and sleep, the theme of clothing, and the theme of erotic love. The three major sets of images enable us to reaffirm the tripartite division of Kafka's world and of its inner relations: the summons is the flow of current from the Law to the self; the nourishment is the sustenance that the self needs in order to attain, preserve, and secure its inner freedom; and the structures and processes are the projections of the world and the self's encounter with it. In a general way, Kafka's writings from 1912 to about 1918 emphasize the annihilating power of the time-space labyrinth; thus, they generally culminate in the violent or ignominious death of the protagonist ("The Judgment," "In the Penal Colony," "The Metamorphosis," and *The Trial*). From 1918 on there is a shift of emphasis toward the nihilistic meaning of the labyrinth ("The Great Wall of China," *The Castle*, "The Burrow"). There is an ironic significance in the fact that all three of these works are fragments in a sense in which *Amerika* or *The Trial* are not; in the latter case, we have at least the concluding chapters, whereas the above-mentioned three works are unfinishable (despite Max Brod's assertions about the ultimate chapter of *The Castle*). The last sentence

of "The Burrow" reads, "But all remained unchanged," and it is emblematic of the disoriented and static quality of Kafka's fiction.

II

The central images in Kafka's landscape, then, are the structures: the architecture of the world and the architecture of the self, and their reciprocal interactions. Using as a key-note the aphorism, "We are digging the mine-shaft of Babel," we may now consider the Chinese Wall, which is expressly equated with the Tower of Babel (it is intended to be a "more secure foundation for a new Tower of Babel") and its metamorphosis into the underground labyrinth of the Burrow; the major difference is that the Chinese Wall is offered to our view as the work of a shadowy High Command, whereas the burrow is the creation of the underground animal itself. (The German titles of the two stories, by using the word "Bau"—building, structure, etc.—make the similarity obvious: "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer" and "Der Bau.")²

If we take these two stories as related and in some sense as supplementing each other, we note that a close reading of the texts gives us an almost direct measure of the meanings: the style reflects the subject matter and is indeed indissolubly unified with it. Kafka is, so to speak, a super-realist who observes carefully the surface appearance of things, and records them with the precision of a 19th-century realist. The difference between him and Flaubert or Chekhov, however, is that the phenomena are there, but their significance remains obscure. Consequently, the precision, sobriety, and neutrality of Kafka's style are a clever ruse to hold the reader in his familiar world, but to indicate at the same time that this world is actually absurd; *i.e.*, the conventionally assumed order of the world is not there. The structure of the cosmos is full of logical gaps, full of discontinuities. When Josef K.,

² The two stories can be found in *Selected Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, tr. by Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Random House, 1952), pp. 129-147 and 256-304, respectively. I have taken the liberty of modifying a few of the translations.

after debating with the chaplain of *The Trial* the occult meanings of the parable "Before the Law," mournfully concludes that the chaplain's exegesis raises the lie to a universal principle, he errs only in believing that the world order as he understands it must be true, and that a contrary reading of the world cannot be permitted; whereas, in fact, the phenomenal world is nothing but deception, and the truth lies hidden somewhere beyond it. The opening sentence of "The Great Wall of China" shows how easily Kafka's style moves from a recording of simple facts, which seem to make sense, to utter nonsense:

The Great Wall of China was finished off at its northern-most corner. From the south-east and the south-west it came up in two sections that finally converged there. This principle of piecemeal construction was also applied on a smaller scale by both of the two great armies of labor, the eastern and the western. It was done in this way: gangs of some twenty workers were formed who had to accomplish a length, say, of five hundred yards of wall, while a similar gang built another stretch of the same length to meet the first. But after the junction had been made the construction of the wall was not carried on from the point, let us say, where this thousand yards ended; instead the two groups of workers were transferred to begin building again in quite different neighborhoods. Naturally in this way many great gaps were left, which were only filled in gradually and bit by bit, some, indeed, not till after the official announcement that the wall was finished. In fact it is said that there are gaps which have never been filled in at all, an assertion, however, which is probably merely one of the many legends to which the building of the wall gave rise, and which cannot be verified, at least by any single man with his own eyes and judgment, on account of the extent of the structure.

This paragraph moves nonchalantly from an objective description of the construction process across the words "principle of piecemeal construction" until we arrive at the word "gaps" and the absurd claim that the Wall could be declared complete when it still had holes in it. From there we go into the regions of hearsay and legend and conclude with the words "cannot be verified."

This deceptive naturalism, which is even more damaging than the style of documentary realism burlesqued by Joyce in the question-and-answer chapter ("Ithaca") of *Ulysses*, constitutes the matrix of Kafka's writing. It is, moreover, a flexible style that can move in the direction of the compulsion-nightmare; and this happens when the protagonist or the self becomes hopelessly entangled in the labyrinth of his own devising. And rarely, in the moments in which the protagonist achieves a glimpse of his own inner repose, the style becomes suffused with a lyrical glow. The parable of the river in the spring contained in "The Great Wall of China" offers a convenient example of the two limits of Kafka's style. The parable is intended to answer the question: How far should an individual go in his attempt to comprehend the designs of the High Command? Here is the first half of the parable:

Consider . . . the river in spring. It rises, grows mightier, nourishes more richly the soil along its long banks, maintains its own identity until it reaches the sea, and thus becomes more of a peer and a more welcome part of the sea.—Thus far may you meditate on the decrees of the high command.

The main sentence rises through a series of spirals, focuses on the words "maintains its own identity," and transfigures the idea in the words "more like a peer and more welcome." In this way, the sentence reflects the lyrical majesty of the triumphant integral self.

The second half of the parable warns of the dangers of overflow:

But after that the river overflows its banks, loses outline and shape, slows down the speed of its current, tries to ignore its destiny by forming little seas in the interior of the land, damages the fields, and yet cannot maintain itself for long in its new expanse, but must run back between its banks again, must even dry up wretchedly in the hot season that presently follows.—Thus far may you not meditate on the decrees of the high command.

Here the sentence, with its rambling, disjointed clauses, reproduces exactly the process of disintegration of the self:

loss of contours, violation of destiny, and the resultant dissipation and desiccation.

The same thing can be seen in the legend of the Imperial Message a few pages later. The dying Emperor has entrusted a message to a courier, and this message is intended for you alone. The courier, "a powerful, an indefatigable man," starts out on his journey but finds that he cannot make his way through the crowds and their dwelling-places:

But instead how vainly does he wear out his strength; still he is only making his way through the chambers of the innermost palace; never will he get to the end of them; and if he succeeded in that, nothing would be gained; he must fight his way next down the stair; and if he succeeded in that, nothing would be gained; the courts would still have to be crossed; and after the courts the second outer palace; and once more stairs and courts; and once more another palace; and so on for thousands of years; and if at last he should burst through the outermost gate—but never, never can that happen—the imperial capital would lie before him, the center of the world, crammed to bursting with its own refuse. Nobody could fight his way through here even with a message from a dead man.—But you sit at your window when evening falls and dream it to yourself.

The fragmentary sentences are an exact "objective correlative" of the frustrated effort to get somewhere; endless space becomes equal to endless time ("and so on for thousands of years") and dissipates itself in a welter of reiterated "never's" But, like a sudden flash, the last sentence offers the hidden answer, the lyrical truth of the meditative heart that is open to the illumination of the infinitely distant.

III

These three stylistic configurations are again related to the triad of landmarks in Kafka's mythical topography: the matrix, formed by the objective structure of the world in all its deceptiveness; the compulsive style as a distortion of the imprisoned self, the eternal squirrel-cage; and, finally, the reposeful lyrical style, glowing with nostalgia for the inward truth.

Thus, the final story written by Kafka examines the nightmare drama of the self in a squirrel-cage of his own making. The burrow is the labyrinthine fort that the underground animal has built in order to safeguard himself and his properties against the outside world. But the animal's problem is not really to secure himself in a fortress of "having" but in a fortress of "being." Two aphorisms make clear the error of this false security: "My prison cell—my fortress" and "There is no Having, there is only Being, only Being desiring the last breath, desiring suffocation." The Daedalus-animal and the *dédale* form an indissoluble unit: "I and the burrow belong . . . indissolubly together . . . I could be quite content to wait [outside] passively, for nothing can part us for long, and somehow or other I shall quite certainly find myself in my burrow again." The labyrinth provides a security exempt from time, which is like the security that sleep offers: it can hold out the false consolation of an unimpregnable structure; or it can intensify the nightmare of total vulnerability. Between these two limits of absolute illusory security and of absolute real insecurity the animal suffers his existential anguish. Time is suspended within the burrow, but it exists inexorably outside the structure, just beyond its thin moss cover. The underground animal realizes that the only logically tenable manner of existence would be at the point of intersection between the temporal external world and the timeless internal world—between alertness and the dream. And so the whole significance of the labyrinth withers away, because it can provide only "restlessness within happiness," which "leads to nothing." A persistent hissing sound, impinging upon the animal's consciousness, serves as a reminder of error and failure. At this point the animal remembers his youth, when he was a "small apprentice" and not yet a "master builder," and the "sound from a distance" that came to him while he was resting from his labor of building ("I have rested far too often from my labors all my life"). At that time the noise roused his curiosity rather than his anguish:

If whoever was boring there was really making for me, because

he had heard me boring, then if he changed his direction, as now actually happened, it could not be told whether he did this because my pause for rest had deprived him of any definite point to make towards, or because—which was more plausible—he had changed his plans. But perhaps I had been deceived altogether, and he had never been actually making in my direction; at any rate the noise grew louder for a while as if he were drawing nearer, and being young at that time I probably would not have been displeased to see the burrower suddenly rising from the ground; but nothing of that kind happened, at a certain point the sound of boring began to weaken, it grew fainter and fainter, as if the burrower were gradually diverging from his first route, and suddenly it broke off altogether, as if he had decided now to take the diametrically opposite direction and were making straight away from me into the distance. For a long time I still went on listening for him in the silence, before I returned once more to my work. Now that warning was definite enough, but I soon forgot it, and it scarcely influenced my building plans.

The summons came early in life, but the call was not heeded. Again and again we encounter this theme in Kafka, especially in his later work (the Bürgel episode in *The Castle*, the false nourishment of the Hunger Artist). These are the most poignant episodes of his work, because they suggest a way in which the existential anguish might be vanquished, the labyrinth metamorphosed into the promised land, the indestructible part of the person uncovered. But the opportunity always passes by, and the sense of dereliction remains. "Once you have followed the false tolling of the night bell—it can never be made good." ("The Country Doctor")

Kafka's notion of sin grows directly out of his conviction that the human being is ever too eager to follow the false summons, or to follow the summons falsely. Several of his aphorisms are directly concerned with impatience, and one might thus describe "The Burrow" as the crime and punishment of impatience:

There are two cardinal sins from which all the others spring: impatience and laziness. Because of impatience we are driven out of Paradise, because of laziness we cannot return. Perhaps, however, there is only one cardinal sin: impatience. Because of

impatience we are driven out, because of impatience we cannot return. (Aphorism No. 3.)

The consequence of this expulsion from paradise is the eternal struggle with the world; the theme of struggle runs through all of Kafka's work, from the very early story "The Account of a Struggle" through "The Judgment" and *The Trial* to *The Castle* and, finally, "The Burrow." The parable of the two adversaries, written in 1920, serves as the paradigm of the "struggle":

He has two enemies: the first obstructs him from behind, from his origin. The second blocks his forward movement. He battles with both. Actually, the first enemy supports him in his battle with the second, for he wants to urge him forward, and similarly the second supports him in his battle with the first, because he drives him back. But this is only theoretical. For, after all, not only the two enemies are there, but also he himself, and who really knows his intentions? In any case, he dreams of someday, in an unguarded moment—but this would require a night so dark as no night has ever been before—breaking out of the battle lines and, on the basis of his battle experience being appointed judge over his embattled enemies. ("He.")

In this nuclear fable of Kafka's we have the entire setting of the existential drama: the sinister farce of captivity, and the dream of liberation. The real answer lies outside the struggle, the possibility of judgment lies within the subject of contention; yet the condition for the liberation is "a night so dark as no night has ever been before."

IV

The dark night of the soul, perhaps? Here the problem of Kafka criticism is confronted with a very special kind of Gordian knot. Kafka once pointed out that Alexander did not try to torture the knot, but simply cut it.³ The problem at hand is whether the final interpretation of Kafka lies within the realm of the religious, or elsewhere. A number of the

³ *Letters to Milena* (New York: Schocken Books, 1953), p. 217.

established approaches of Kafka criticism are inadmissible; for example, the view that regards the work as an exposé of the absurdity of bureaucratic organization restricts itself to what Kafka plainly regarded as the "lie" that has assumed the proportions of a "universal principle." Psychoanalytic interpretations of Kafka, though interesting, fall far short of the mark; Kafka was well aware of the self-therapeutic aspects of his work. Even the religious interpretations of Kafka's work which see in the structure of the absurd world of *The Trial* or *The Castle* a symbolic representation of the impenetrable workings of Grace fail to account for the fact that something as ridiculous and sordid as the court or castle bureaucracy can hardly be taken as an adequate analogy for the mysterious operations of Divine Grace. The problem in Kafka criticism, in brief, is to consider whether Kafka's use of myth and parable tends in any clearly defined direction, or whether the use of myth has not in this case been necessitated by the very ambiguity of the human situation as Kafka understood it.

The problem involves some kind of decision on the part of the interpreter as to the relationship of the aphoristic writings to the fiction. The aphorisms are clearly within the orbit of theological and ethical reflection; their collective title is "Meditations on Sin, Suffering, Hope and the True Way." They are meditations about the self and the world. The fiction, on the other hand, projects these abstractions into the concreteness of the human experience. Aphorism 46 states the issue succinctly: "Das Wort 'sein' bedeutet in Deutschen beides: Dasein und Ihm-gehören." (The word 'to be' in German means two things: being-there and belonging-to-it.) *Dasein*, Heidegger's word for "existence," versus "belonging," being had by something, which is the obverse of "having." This problem of Being and Having is fundamental to an interpretation of Kafka. The aphorisms chart the "right way" to the homeland of Being; the fiction traces the process of *dépaysement*, the nostalgia for Being in the maze of Having. And so one may say that in the aphorisms Kafka has an intimation of the goal:

Believing means: to liberate the Indestructible in oneself, or better: to liberate oneself; or better: to be indestructible; or better: to be. (Diary entry of November 30, 1917.)

Theoretically there exists one complete possibility of happiness: to believe in the indestructible within yourself and not to strive toward it. (Aphorism No. 69.)

Man cannot live without a permanent trust in something indestructible within himself, yet both the indestructible and the trust may be permanently concealed from him. One of the possible expressions of this concealment is the belief in a personal God. (Aphorism No. 50.)

This is one of the rare instances in which Kafka mentions the name of God in his writings. Inasmuch as he can speak of God as one of the possible expressions of concealment, his religious thinking is in close proximity to the existentialist theologians whose point of departure is the eclipse of God. An observation by Martin Buber, who knew Kafka personally, is appropriate here, particularly if we take Buber's "It" to correspond to the objective world of Kafka's fiction:

In our age the I-It relation, gigantically swollen, has usurped, practically uncontested, the mastery and the rule. The I of this relation, an I that possesses all, makes all, succeeds with all, that I that is unable to say Thou, unable to meet a being existentially, is the lord of the hour. This selfhood that has become omnipotent, with all the It around it, can naturally acknowledge neither God nor any genuine absolute which manifests itself to men as of non-human origin. It steps in between and shuts off the light from heaven.⁴

But Kafka's quest is not for the Thou, nor for the light of heaven—Kafka's feeling for transcendence is no longer positive—but simply for "The Law." The crux of the problem of interpretation lies here: what does he mean by "The Law"?

It is certainly not the Torah, although Kafka's language here, as in other cases, bears witness to the fact that he never cut himself off (nor did he want to) from Judaism altogether. The real root of the problem is to be found in his consciousness of guilt. Guilt attracts the Law, he states in the first chap-

⁴ *Eclipse of God* (New York: Harper's, 1957), p. 129.

ter of *The Trial*. And where there is guilt, there must be judgment. It is as if Kafka had lost his belief in the validity of the First Commandment and the existence of God altogether, while remaining profoundly convinced of the obligation imposed upon the human being by the Second and Third Commandments. If God does not exist, we must not (and indeed cannot), under any circumstances, make images of him; and so we must preserve a discreet silence about his absence. But the moral authority remains, which must now be shouldered totally by the individual. This ethical position, which retains the contours (but no longer the substance) of Judaism, has a number of affinities with more recent eschatological interpretations of Jesus:

The Messiah will come as soon as the most unbridled individualism of belief is possible,—when no one destroys this possibility, when no one tolerates its destruction, that is to say: when the graves open. Perhaps this is also the teaching of Christianity, not only in the actual demonstration of the model to be followed, an individualistic model, but also in the symbolic demonstration of the resurrection of the mediator in the individual man. (Diary entry of November 30, 1917.)

As a result of this ethical and theological position, Kafka is compelled to reinterpret the Fall of Man:

Original sin, the ancient wrong that man has committed, consists of the complaint which man makes and never ceases making that a wrong has been done to him, that the original sin was committed upon him. ("He.")

We are sinners not only because we have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, but also because we have not yet eaten from the Tree of Life. The state in which we find ourselves is sinful, independent of guilt. (Aphorism No. 83.)

We are separated from God on both sides: the Fall separates us from him, the Tree of Life separates him from us. (January 18, 1918.)

Thus the above reference to *The Trial* needs to be amended: it is man's awareness of sin, not guilt, that attracts the Law. But it is not the world, or even God, that sits in judgment over us; the awareness of sin is our summons to self-judgment,

our appointment as mediator within ourselves. "Only our notion of time allows us to speak of a Last Judgment, but actually it is a court in perpetual session." (Aphorism No. 40.) But the court is ourselves, and the judge is that very same self of the parable of the two adversaries that dreams of a leap out of the battle line to pronounce the verdict upon the two combatants within himself.

V

Whether this task can be fulfilled, or whether it was fulfilled by Kafka, is a question that cannot be answered with certainty. "Moses did not enter the promised land, not because his life was short, but because it was a human life." The aphorisms define the goal, the fiction describes the failure to reach it. The temptations of Gnosticism block the way to fulfillment: the world of evil constantly obscures the true way. Erich Heller calls the Castle in Kafka's novel a "heavily fortified garrison of a company of Gnostic demons, successfully holding an advanced position against the manoeuvres of an impatient soul."⁵ Consider, for instance, the following aphorism (No. 54): "There is only a spiritual world; what we call the physical world is the evil in the spiritual one. . . ." Manichean ideas, such as this one, play havoc with Kafka's chances of achieving freedom. On the one hand, he regards the physical world as evil, as did Schopenhauer; but on the other hand, he knows that the way to the Law must somehow go through the world of necessity and of falsehood. Had Kafka been a mystic, the renunciation of the world might have been possible. As it is, however, he finds himself trapped in the contradictions of the hunger for self-transcendence without a transcendent God and a horror of immanence, without being able to detach himself from the world. A diary entry of 1918 reads as follows:

I represent the negative elements of my age. . . . Unlike Kierkegaard, I was not led into life by the now heavily sinking hand of Christianity, nor have I caught hold, like the Zionists, of

⁵ *The Disinherited Mind*, p. 223.

the last wisp of the vanishing prayer-shawl of the Jews. I am an end or a beginning.

Negative Christianity, negative Judaism, negative transcendence—all this enables us to understand the curious aphorism (No. 27) that reads, "To do the negative is yet our task; the positive is already given to us."

But the positive is hidden away under a myriad of layers of falsehoods, all but forgotten:

Before you enter the Holy of Holies you must remove your shoes, but not only your shoes, but everything, traveling costume and luggage, and beneath it your nakedness and everything that is beneath the nakedness, and everything that is hidden beneath it, and then you must remove the core, and the core of the core, then what is left and then all the rest and then still the glow of the indestructible fire. Only the fire itself is absorbed by the Holy of Holies and lets itself be absorbed by it: neither of the two can resist. (January 25, 1918.)

It is wrong, then, to think of Kafka only as an author of despair. Not so vigorously affirmative as Dostoevsky, whose "Hosannahs passed first through a crucible of doubt," he nevertheless raises a small voice of affirmation:

It is not necessary for you to leave your house. Remain seated at your table and listen. Do not even listen, only wait. Do not even wait, be completely silent and alone. The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked, it cannot help doing so, transfigured it will wind itself away from you. (Aphorism 109.)

The conditions for true being are silence and patience. The conquest of paradise is achieved in silence, whereas the victory of the labyrinth is accompanied by tumult. The tumult resembles the speech of the nomads in the story "An Old Manuscript":

They do not know our language, indeed they hardly have a language of their own. They communicate with each other much as jackdaws do. A screeching of jackdaws is always in our ears. Our way of living and our institutions they neither understand nor care to understand. And so they are unwilling to make sense even out of our sign language.⁶

⁶ *Selected Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, p. 162

Since the Czech word *kavka* means "jackdaw," Kafka is here slyly alluding to the experience of the world as Bedlam and as Babel. His work, one might say, is suspended between the labyrinth and the paradise, between the inner fortress and the Tower of Babel. It is, paradoxically, a monument to silence constructed out of babble. Only Kafka's unique myth-making powers could have suspended this strange and fragile bridge between contradictory supports.

It is a bridge nevertheless. Despite the overwhelmingly negative elements, there is at least the glimpse of a possible security, a security that is absent from the total nihilism of a writer like Samuel Beckett (a past master of "silent" babble), who has perhaps most in common with Kafka. Yet, according to Martin Buber,⁷ "even the most exposed Jew like Kafka" bears witness in some way to the Judaic conception of faith (Emunah): "The unredeemed soul refuses to give up the evidence of the unredeemed world from which it suffers, to exchange it for the soul's own salvation." Referring specifically to Kafka, Buber remarks:

His unexpressed, ever-present theme is the remoteness of the judge, the remoteness of the lord of the castle, the hiddenness, the eclipse, the darkness; and therefore he observes: 'He who believes can experience no miracle. During the day one does not see any stars.' This is the nature of the Jew's security in the dark, one which is essentially different from that of the Christian.

But the difficulty for Kafka is seeing the stars even at night and thus arriving at the certitude that the stars are there also during the day. This struggle against the temptation of Gnosticism provides the key to Kafka's ambiguity—the ambiguity in the works themselves, and the unresolved tension between the fiction and the aphorisms. He thought of his work—perhaps jokingly—as a "new Kabbalah." Yet in some ways he recapitulates the fundamental dilemma of the Jewish mystic, as described by Gershom Scholem:

⁷ Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), pp. 168-9.

The Jewish mystic lives and acts in perpetual rebellion against a world with which he strives with all his zeal to be at peace. Conversely, this fact is responsible for the profound ambiguity of his outlook, and it also explains the apparent self-contradiction inherent in a great many Kabbalist symbols and images.⁸

Kafka brought these self-contradictions, which constitute the very dilemma of the modern religious consciousness since Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, to a point of incandescence that assures him a place among the greatest writers of the modern era. But it was beyond his power to resolve the dilemma with complete satisfaction. Despite his tormented quest for the Indestructible, the words that remain longest in our memory as the stamp and image of their author are the agonized final words of the Hunter Gracchus: "My ship has no rudder, and it is driven by the wind that blows in the undermost regions of death."⁹

⁸ Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), p. 34.

⁹ *Selected Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, p. 187.

THE ASSAILANT AND THE VICTIM: SOME DEFINITIONS OF MODERN VIOLENCE

Frederick J. Hoffman

"On fait les plus grands cruautés, mais sans cruauté" (Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le Noir*).

I

IT IS BECOMING MORE AND MORE clear that traditional standards for measuring and judging violence, or for describing it in literature, are inadequate. We can usefully think of the problem as one involving the pressures of force acting upon language. Even when language is supported by its being organized into "systems" of thought or ideologies, it only occasionally succeeds in making us understand the violence. It may be that ideology, as we came to accept the term in the 1930's, is no longer useful to us as a means of comprehending modern explosions of physical and mechanical force.

The spectacle of the liberal man of good will trying to measure his reactions to an event that his kind of ideology cannot entirely master is a common enough fact of recent criticism. One example of it is Dwight Macdonald's review of John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, which should prove instructive.

The "little people" of Hiroshima whose sufferings Hersey records in antiseptic *New Yorker* prose might just as well be white mice, for all the pity, horror or indignation the reader—or at least this reader—is made to feel for them. And yet Hersey's intention, which apparently was successfully communicated to many thousands of other readers, was to convey precisely such emotions. It is puzzling. Perhaps my feeling is simply that naturalism is no longer adequate, either esthetically or morally, to cope with the modern horrors. (*Memoirs of a Revolutionist*)

The truth is that pity and horror and indignation do not suffice precisely because they are human reactions in an in-

human situation. Setting aside the question of responsibility in this case—whether it be Truman's or Churchill's or Hirohito's or Fermi's—the event goes beyond the saturation point of human pity, horror, and indignation. This is why modern violence poses a problem that traditional standards of criticism cannot cope with. Modern violence presents a situation that is serious, fragmentary in itself, and of an incredibly devastating magnitude; so that language is inadequate to the double task of remaining clearly faithful to its circumstance and at the same time arousing pity and fear in such a way as to effect a purging of these emotions. The participants in this situation protect themselves by absorbing enough of the energy of the assailant to avoid being destroyed by it.

It may be that new ratios of force and language are necessary. The rhetorical functions of a language do have a significant relationship to current practices and manners of adjusting to facts—that is, to the degree of impact a factual situation has upon us. Perhaps we can speculate upon the condition of literary style in our time in terms of a scale of tensions between fact and eloquence. Fact calls attention to itself; eloquence, to the meaning of fact. Eloquence is that use of language which exceeds the minima needed to define fact. The purpose of eloquence is to direct the reader's attention away from fact, to link fact with one or several of the systems of larger meaning which in any period circumscribe fact. Eloquence also acts to slow the rhythm of factual succession. In key passages of classical drama, sequences of minor facts lead to a major fact; this latter requires a pause, for in the very announcement of a major fact is suggested the necessity of some kind of meditation. The language of the drama at that point is designed to encourage, perhaps to require, a meditative pause. The more intensely violent fact becomes, the more solicitous is eloquence to mitigate its intensity. The occasion of violence is of itself instantaneous; eloquence devises rhetorical associations of the instant to cause and occasion.

The complex systems of rhetorical ceremony—religious, doctrinal, and aesthetic—are elaborate patterns of mitigation.

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They say in effect that man is more than any given fact, however intensely a part of his experience that fact may be. A rudimentary "scientific" fact exists within a chain or sequence of facts but owns its value primarily because of its answering to the requirements of factuality. That is, it is not distinctively one in a chain but rather one in itself, for the moment that it is. In an extremely literal sense, a "factual style" is one that excludes as much as is linguistically possible (which is to say, culturally possible) of the mitigating circumstances of eloquence. Eloquence fights against the isolated factuality of fact, struggles to enable cultural implications to establish themselves, to distract the mind from the factual center, in short to allow the mind the chance to move away from the fact into the area of associative rhetoric.

II

In a brilliant and suggestive essay in revaluation of *The Iliad*, Simone Weil says that the ultimate objective of force is to reduce men to things. The horrifying fact is that the real *materiel* in warfare is the human personality, "fallen to the level either of inert matter, which is all passivity, or to the level of blind forces, which are all momentum. . . ." The primary means of a successful war is the reduction of men to the level of beasts: ". . . the veritable object of the art of war is no less than the souls of the combatants." ("The 'Iliad,' Poem of Might," p. 45.)

The two major wars of our century are the focus of any discussion of modern violence. From every point of view, sociological, psychological, and aesthetic, they have helped severely to dislocate the forms according to which force in the past was contained. Miss Weil defines force as "that which makes a thing of anybody who comes under its sway. When exercised to the full, it makes a thing of man in the most literal sense, for it makes him a corpse." (p. 24.) The concentration of force upon a single area may also reduce survivors to the level of soulless victims who expect such treatment and live in the expectation of it.

The crucial result of the modern maneuvering of force has been the loss of human power to think, plan, and act in terms of the metaphors of his cultural inheritance. These metaphors have survived only peripherally; they are no longer at the center of human schemes or motivations. They have always depended upon the belief in a transcendent power, and they work out from such a central metaphor. Put simply, and perhaps superficially, the power of Nature has in the past either been incorporated into or equalized by the power of gods. From this central idea the language of belief, ceremony, and ritual assumed its character. Basic to this arrangement is the belief that the power of the gods is sufficient to provide a ritual haven from human death and corruption. The secret of classical tragedy—of its effect—lies not only in the fact that the hero's death is an active resolution of the moral and spiritual disturbances caused by his life; it depends also upon the conviction that the hero's role will persist in a postmortem, retrospective consideration of these disturbances. Almost invariably, tragedy requires a controlled view and estimate of corpses. It also demands a clear line of progress in the analysis of events leading to death. Death as total surprise loses much of its tragic value. Reflection upon causes is difficult in these circumstances. The character and number of corpses resulting from the action must in some way or other be deducible from the quality of mind and spirit responsible for them.

Tradition in literature has always relied upon some such conviction regarding the rhythm of causes in life and results in death. The earliest form of literary representation of the ways in which this rhythm is violated was the metamorphic tradition. Metamorphosis is necessary to a successful comprehension of a religion in which the divine and the human are closely related. The gods are an enabling cause of metamorphosis in human dramas which involve violent extremes of conduct. They protect, punish, and correct the affairs of men. Metamorphosis is an instrument of divine intervention, in the interests of preserving the belief in a balance of divine and human natures. But the word may also simply mean

change, and in this sense it may suggest reduction rather than transcendence. The balance of natural and transcendent powers requires that force will be contained: that it will be understood as metaphorically and ritually accessible to human comprehension. Men are held accountable for their persons and their acts at each point in the progress. Their power should submit at each point to the systems and rituals of containment. The principal instrument of that slow and gradual process is form, a product both of man's mind and of his imagination. Man is above all a formalizing creature, and his sanity and balance depend upon the success of his comprehending experience formally.

One important description of violence is that it serves to threaten the balance of forms. Since forms are a result of the mental and imaginative functions, violence frequently comes from a distortion of one or the other, which throws the formal economy into imbalance. The important requisite of forms is that man should *intend* them, and that, intending them, he should believe in them as more than adequately constructive explanations of his condition and its prospects of continuity. One way of explaining modern culture is to say that the relationship between the two functions responsible for forms has broken down, that as a result of this failure of balance it has become extremely difficult to comprehend life and death formally. The forms no longer contain the force; the force is unleashed; it is perhaps at the disposal of the intellect but not reliably of the imagination. Man has arrived at the point in his history where he regards force as an autonomous evil, available only occasionally and not predictably to human controls.

Several important formal agents of balance are therefore menaced. For it is indispensable to morality that the objects involved in human relationships be *visible* both to the mind and to the imagination. This concept of visibility is crucial to the problem of containment. Emotions expressed outwardly assume a comprehensible interaction of agent and object. Love necessitates both lover and beloved; they are necessarily visible to each other. Hatred likewise suggests an

agent who expresses hostility and a victim who receives and in some way deserves it.

Visibility suggests measurable distances. A relationship that is forcefully expressed is no longer formally contained if the distance between motivated agent and object is too great to be comprehended. The moral problem of the 20th century begins at the point at which the distance between agent and object is lost to the mind and to the imagination. It can no longer be formally contained; or, at any rate, the forms used to comprehend it no longer serve the purpose adequately.

III

Both the morality and the literature of our time are irresolute in their search for forms to explain present dispositions of force. Extremely weird phenomena result. Innocence and ignorance combine with a narrowly specialized training to the achievement of motiveless and apparently blameless mass murder. Exorbitantly forceful heroism is hurriedly mobilized to save men from the consequences of "impudent crimes." Man lives in danger not only of death but of extinction. The vision of death in these circumstances is no longer of a conclusion to an orderly rhythm of the life process. The dignity of dying is continuously and shamelessly insulted. The most insufferable characteristic of modern calamities is their casual suddenness, their informality; this lack of formal relationship disperses man's power to anticipate, expect, prepare, and comprehend. Simone Weil has described this condition with great pertinence:

. . . That men should have death for their future is a denial of nature. As soon as the practice of war has revealed the fact that each moment holds the possibility of death, the mind becomes incapable of moving from one day to the next without passing through the spectre of death. . . . That soul daily suffers violence which every morning must mutilate its aspirations because the mind cannot move about in a time without passing through death. In this way war wipes out every con-

ception of a goal, even all thoughts concerning the goals of war . . . (p. 41.)

Constant threat of death and the absence of any formal means of expecting and adjusting to it serve to destroy man's power to live meaningfully. Modern wars have therefore thrown the moral and literary economy very much off balance. Our literature abounds in illustrations of men submitting blindly to a condition of overwhelming force, supported indifferently or inexpertly by abstract substitutes for individual motive. The individual detail of this landscape of violence testifies again and again to the serious dislocation of result from motive. Distances all but exclude the chance of determining the assailant or making the necessary adjustment to him as an agent expressing hostility for an object. In any really meaningful sense, both the agent and the object of this relationship have disappeared from the scene; and since they have, the individual is left, as Miss Weil has said, with the immediate and continuous prospect of death as extinction.

Modern literature has acted in various ways to describe this emergency. In the first World War, certain novelists invoked large abstractions from the past as a talismanic substitute for motive, or (as in the case of H. G. Wells) invented abstractions pointing to an imagined postwar future. According to these, we endured the prospect of sudden death in order to preserve a tradition. This is not the same as fighting *for* tradition; it is rather as though a religious war were fought solely to enable God to survive His enemies. Neither tradition nor God is in this case a viable force in determining the motive for combat. For the majority of war novelists, poets, and dramatists, the literary portrayal of the new violence was of one of two kinds: either the artist focused upon the factuality of circumstance or he portrayed the physiological and psychological changes occurring in the hero as he shifted from an abstract to a specific understanding of his condition.

There have been many variations in this literature, but perhaps the major development from World War I to World War II is that the literary analysis of the assailant-victim rela-

tionship has increased in subtlety. The human circumstance of World War I permitted fairly easy and simple ironies, both those caused by an obvious disparity between promised objective and actual reality and those implicit in the miscarriages of justice that attend a condition of extraordinary violence. In other words, the violence of the first war was still new and the shock of dislocation fresh. Men were angry, but they were still not willing to surrender the privilege of being angry over a specific cause. War literature of this kind tends to rely upon a certain strength of romantic emotion; even the sense of horror is influenced by sentimental survivals of meaning which attach to the victims of the horror. That is, men are angry but still fairly sure of the sources of their anger; or they are horrified in the sense that they still remember what it meant not to feel horror.

The literature of the second war is at once more fully committed to scatologies of violence and more subtly analytic of the individual's ambiguous role in the drama of violence. This does not necessarily mean that it is a superior literature. In some respects it is much more remote from the human possibilities of maintaining a formal balance. It is only that the artist is not satisfied to suggest either irony or horror in its simple or pure form. The literature of violence has moved away from social satire to an analysis of the forms of "metaphysical conceit" available in present circumstances. These "conceits" have largely to do with the dissolution of corpses or their dismemberment, or with the phenomena of masses of men dead from an assailant so far removed as to be entirely invisible, or with the totally irrational situation of a village of smiling citizens scrupulously ignoring a nearby "experiment" in mass extermination. These are aberrational instances of the new violence. The moral questions they raise cannot be discussed according to any simple equations, but must be considered in terms of the most complex of Kafkan ambiguities. As a reminder of death, the "bracelet of bright hair about the bone" is superseded by the tangle of bodies in a denatured landscape.

IV

The usual description of a non-violent death and its relationship to life is that the two exist in a formal pattern; in this case, man lives according to the formal rhythm of his expectation of death. Violent death results from a concentration of force which disrupts these patterns. There are kinds of violence that are still comprehensible in terms of them. A criminal who kills another man may express himself violently, but in this case the cause of the crime is discernible, can be described, and, indeed, is analyzed according to all of the means at our disposal for understanding his violent act. Further, the victim of the crime shares implication in the cause; the victim as object collaborates with the assailant as agent, to the extent at least of being somehow and to some degree involved in the act as cause. An adulterer, surprised by a woman's husband or lover, has in the few seconds before he dies a chance to consider the nature of his deserving the violence. Violence of this kind is contained within the formal possibilities governing the move from birth to death.

There are two kinds of violence which do not submit to such formal explanation: sentimental violence and impersonal violence. The first is a violence committed in excess of all possible degrees of expectation, or violence "in excess of the occasion." The second is violence committed in the absence of an agent, a condition in which an agent cannot be logically or reasonably or even metaphorically determined. A *cause* can be found, of course, but it is not contained within any set of motivations belonging to an agent. When Randall Jarrell says, of scientific discoveries, that "The equations metamorphose into use" ("The Emancipators"), he suggests an extreme case of impersonal or agentless violence. The equations are abstract, or if based on concrete instances, have no necessary connection with them or with instances of them, in perpetuity. Similarly, "use" means result and is not emotionally or responsibly indentifiable with a specific person in the act of using. In an act of impersonal violence, the agent

no longer serves the object; his mind, imagination, and skill serve the cause instead. Knowledge of or acquaintance with the object, if it ever exists, is accidental, and may even be forbidden. In another poem, Jarrell describes this situation and provides an illustration of it:

. . .

It is unnecessary to understand; if you are still
 In this year of our warfare, indispensable
 In general, and in particular dispensable
 As a cartridge, a life—it is only to enter
 So many knots in a window, so many feet;
 To switch on for an instant the steel that understands.
 Do as they said; as they said, there is always a reason—
 Though neither for you nor for the fatal
 Knower of wind, speed, pressure; the unvalued facts.
 ("Siegfried")

. . .

These two types of violence between them account for most of the ambiguities residing in modern literature. Each has an almost endless range of variation. Sentimental violence occurs when the agent distorts his responsibility to the object; he exercises pure force but is guided by an impure motive. Nevertheless, he still functions as a person, though his grasp of what a personality is is often vague, clouded, aberrant. Robert Cohn of *The Sun Also Rises* is such an agent. He does not exist within the "code" of explicitly understood limits that govern or should govern the intimate friends of Jake Barnes; he acts in terms of another group altogether, and each of the persons with whom he associates has an isolated meaning for him. The power he exercises is his skill in boxing. With it, he serves the role of single-minded romantic, against images of supposed opposition. In a sense, Cohn's blows are struck for purity against impurities and as such are an additional commentary upon the pathos of Jake's contemporaries. But the occasion does not call for violence of the kind he exerts; the violence is directed not in understanding but in willful distortion of its object.

Sentimental violence can also be seen in its relation to im-

personal violence. Whenever an agent acts sentimentally against a victim in such a way as to include in the resulting disaster persons not in any way associated in the role of victim with him, sentimental violence becomes impersonal. The change is almost entirely a matter of instrumentation; the agent chooses both weapon and circumstance that involve persons who are not designated victims. Had Cohn used a machine gun and shot at Pedro Romero in a crowd, the two kinds of violence would have combined. Or, if a man who wished to avenge himself upon another should place a bomb in a plane and destroy him as well as thirty-five other passengers, he would be guilty of both kinds of violence. He is an agent of one death, a cause of the other thirty-five.

Impersonal violence, therefore, occurs when instruments of force are so powerful and so intricately developed that the agent of destruction can and does cancel himself as a person motivated to do violence upon another. In some respects, many acts of abnormal violence committed in concentration camps are a mixture of sentimental and impersonal violence: as in the case reported in Ernst Wiechert's novel, *Missa Sine Nomine*. The hero's memory of his concentration camp experience included the dreadful image of the torturer who smiled as he tortured.

I could have shot him through the heart, but I shot into his face. Perhaps I thought that with a heart-shot he might get up again, because there was a vacuum in his body where we have a heart. Nothing but an empty space. His life was only in his face which we had seen smiling. Many, many times. And I shot into this smile. (p. 36.)

This man's smile was a violation of his role as minister to an impersonal assailant. It either betrayed an extraordinary sadistic pleasure in what he was doing or was a form of decadent commentary upon the disruption of human values that characterized the scene. There is no question that the hero's act of violence (for which he atones, that he may once again live at peace in the world) was neither sentimental nor impersonal, but a *crime passionnel* of an exceptional kind.

V

It is important to note that conditions of extreme impersonal violence, as for example our two World Wars, are followed by times of great tension. Attempts to restore forms that have been respected before a time of great violence almost invariably fail. The most eloquent defense of these forms proves inadequate, because each violation of the rhythm of life-death expectancy upsets the formal capacity for acceptance. Men live in a state of tension, which is a minor peacetime legacy of violence. In a sense also, the experiencing of violence stimulates the demand for its repetition, if only for the purpose of challenging and testing man's ability to raise the forms to a new level and to accommodate the new violences within them.

A great many phenomena in literature can be explained if we accept this fact. Eliot's interest in the metaphysical poets comes not only from the conviction that feeling and thought are inseparable, but also from the realization that the present feeling, with which thought needs to be fused, is of a different kind and force. In the years between the wars, the interest in Dante's *Inferno* greatly exceeded that in the other two books of the *Comedy*, because the *Inferno* provides concrete images of punishment for documented crimes, but mostly because the details of the punishment expanded by eternity become absorbing extensions of the real. Donne's paradoxes concerning the body in death and the transcendent spirit served the same role (as a means of comprehending the tension) as the bullfight served in Hemingway's case. They were extraordinarily different ways of containing the violence, but each in its own selective way was an experiment in adjustment.

Tension may be defined as the emotional and psychological disposition of the victim toward the assailant. This condition persists beyond the assailant's tenure. Indeed, the quality of tension experienced at any time is influenced by the violence that has preceded it. In a time of war, men become accustomed to a certain accelerated form of expectation. This tension remains when the conditions causing it have been removed. As

a result, they attempt various kinds of improvisation. The change from war to peace is too difficult to assume that the prewar forms will suffice. Hemingway's story, "Soldier's Home," has many interesting contemporary variants. After each of the two war experiences, there has been a redispotion and revaluation of peacetime forms to account for and, if possible, to accommodate the new accesses of violence. The new, peacetime equivalent of form must somehow suggest the recently quieted violence. In every case, the most difficult of the tasks of adjustment comes in the attempt to restore the experience to familiar, comprehensible terms. It is a way of establishing a mode of getting used to the violence, of bringing it back to the level of personal event over which one has a chance at least of personal control.

Paul-Louis Landsberg describes the bullfight as one of the forms in which violence and death are contained in dramatic retrospect and thus the human condition restored to an acceptable balance:

In the bull ring the bull takes the place of man and man plays the rôle of the archangel or demon. He revenges himself for being in the grip of fate by taking on the rôle of fate towards another. For once it is *man* who knows and foresees what he will accomplish. Thus for two hours he can forget his own inevitable death by becoming master of the death of a substitute. . . . (*The Experience of Death*, p. 49).

It is not only that man can temporarily reverse his roles. Primarily the appeal of the bullfight for Hemingway, who most successfully defined postwar tension, is that it was a violent sport and—more important—that it involved not only the risk of violence but the possibility of controlling it. Hemingway turned precisely to the condition which was most often lacking in the war situation, the condition of forces opposing each other in such a formalized way that grace and courage could triumph over the assailant. As the source of the violence, the bull offered neither sentimental nor impersonal violence, but a formally contained, traditionally and dramatically developed experience of antagonism. *The Sun Also Rises* is a major literary testimony to the postwar act of ad-

justing to the tensions created by the experience of World War I.

The full range of modern violence may be comprehended in terms of the metaphor of assailant and victim. I have already described several aspects of the relationship. The assailant as person in the comprehensible relationship of the *crime passionnel* is the most conventional and the most traditional of these literary situations. One may include certain types of suicide in this formula: as for example, Anna Karenina's killing herself, in which she acts both as agent and as victim. Emma Bovary, in this connection, may be said to have committed sentimental violence upon herself. A more frequent modern pattern is that seen in the figure of the assailant as an ideological instrument. Here the assailant is an idea, or a system of ideas, to which one becomes attached at various times as agent, perhaps only once as victim. This formula frequently issues in impersonal violence, and much of the surface irony of modern literature is concerned with man's efforts to preserve the personal relationship of agent to object, in the face of very strong pressures toward impersonality. Perhaps Dostoevsky was the shrewdest of all commentators upon this irony. Raskolnikov, who strives to commit a murder on ideological grounds, ends by atoning for the crime of violently despising humanity. The murder of Shatov in *The Devils* is an elaborate expression of this formula. Surely the 20th-century examples of it are abundant, in the novels of Malraux, Silone, Koestler, and Orwell, and in scores of lesser works.

A variant of these first two forms is that of the assailant as mob. The mob is still personal, in the sense that human passions of specific kinds discernible to the victim are the motivation of the violence. But it is also and more powerfully impersonal in the sense that a mob is many persons and no one person. The assailant is in this case a mass emotion or an expression of mass power against a victim, coming from a distortedly narrow and morally ambiguous source. In Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust*, the mob appears to young Chick Mallison as "The Face," suggesting a composite which is

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not a personality, but the dehumanized expression of partial motivations. It is interesting to see also that in this novel Faulkner sets "The Man" against "The Face," and in that sense suggests that only a precisely understood relation between a personal assailant and a personal victim is justifiable.

The next level, the assailant as machine, comprehends a wide variety of dislocations in the relationship. An instrument in the hands of the agent acts immediately to pervert the relationship. Guns, artillery, planes, tanks, are all mechanical extensions of force; in use against a victim, they increase the distance between him and the assailant to the point of rendering the situation impersonal and fortuitous. The continuing increase in mechanization of the instrument, while it does not rule out courage in fighting, acts radically to alter the nature and the prerequisites of courage. As Lewis Mumford has said, "The difference between the Athenians with their swords and shields fighting on the fields of Marathon, and the soldiers who faced each other with tanks, guns, flame-throwers, poison gases, and hand-grenades on the Western Front, is the difference between the ritual of the dance and the routine of the slaughter house." (*Technics and Civilization*, p. 310.) The important distinction here is that of a decreasing power of personal evaluation; the assailant begins by having a mechanical advantage over the victim. In the end, the assailant is the machine itself, and whatever of the person remains has itself become mechanical. The ethics of power are indistinguishable from technics. We can discuss the rightness or evil of an act of mechanical destruction only after it has been accomplished. These machines of destruction produce quantities of victims, and their effectiveness increases as the distance between them and the victim grows. Eventually they produce death of several kinds; they destroy not only persons but the scene itself which is the ground of the action. They create waste lands and prepare the way for the final type of assailant-victim relationship, the assailant as landscape.

One might also call this last the assailant as space. It is a special kind and quality of space, combining monotony of

surfaces with dehumanization, as in the streets that follow "like a tedious argument, / Of insidious intent," of Prufrock's Boston. The metaphor of the landscape as assailant suggests the total withdrawal of human familiarity from both assailant and victim. Literature describing this kind of assailant is necessarily full of spatial images, whose qualities are repetitious and lifeless. They are externalizations of fear, horror, despair. They frequently suggest death or an eternity of dehumanized landscape. Their primary modern image is the concentration camp.

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Note: the quotation with which this essay begins, and parts of the three paragraphs that follow it are taken from my essay, "The Moment of Violence," in the October 1960 issue of *Essays in Criticism*.